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SUCCESS, PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT: MARKING THE
PROGRESS OF EDUCATION REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC OF GUINEA

By

Mark Anthony Hamilton

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

2007

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ABSTRACT

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The concept of progress has taken on new meanings in international development worldwide over the course of the past two decades. According to recently published documents, what has come to be called *human* development has become a matter of promoting the participation of ordinary people in their 'own' development (e.g., UNDP 1991/1993; World Bank & IMF 2005). In the Republic of Guinea, such documents link social and economic progress to citizen participation in poverty reduction (e.g., UNDP 2002a). Popular participation in poverty reduction is cast within these documents as part of an ostensibly inclusive effort toward addressing what they characterize as a historically dominant, centralized, and exclusionary macroeconomic development model. Nowhere has participation become more visible in Guinea and other developing countries than in the education sector, in which reform-oriented documents portray so-called 'community' involvement as a way of empowering citizens (Kothari 2001) and making local officials more accountable for children's schooling (McGinn & Walsh 1999). Yet what has participation come to mean within a given local context?

The present study uses archival research, ethnography, and interviews to examine how local meanings of participation and progress compare with those encountered in recent documents on education reform and development in

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Guinea. The local site of my research was a single school-community located in the Fuuta-Jaloo region of Guinea, in which parents, teachers, and school board members described their own ways of thinking about participation—in the context of school success. Findings show that national/international discourse cannot adequately capture the complexities of pre-existing and highly localized meanings associated with participation among people living in a single school community of Guinea's Fuuta Jaloo region. The study has significant implications for both policy and future research on participatory development.

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To my friend, Mamoudou BAH, and his family
For all of their support during the years
I spent in Guinea
And to my own family here in the United States
For encouraging me to follow my heart

A mon cher ami et confiant, Mamoudou BAH
Et sa famille
De m'avoir appuyé pendant les années
Que je suis passé en Guinée
Et à ma propre famille aux Etats-Unis
De m'avoir encouragé à suivre mon cœur

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thoughtful, authentic and intelligent teaching showed me what mindful research and scholarship can truly mean.

I would especially like to thank my family and friends, particularly my father, Bill Hamilton, and my mother, Phyllis, for their proud support, wisdom and understanding. I also want to thank Amy Jamison, who had faith in me through some of the toughest challenges of all. Lastly, I would like to say a special thank you to my brother, Kirk, whose memory continues to inspire me.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	African Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
APEAE	Association des Parents et Amis d'Ecole [Parent-Teachers' Association]
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail [General Confederation of Labor]
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EFA	Education for All
EI	Enquête Intégrale [Integrated Survey]
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GF	Guinea franc
GNP	Gross national product
HDI	Human Development Index
HDI	Human Development Initiative
HDR	Human Development Report
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPI	Human Poverty Index
IDA	International Development Association
IDH	Initiatif du Développement Humaine [Human Development Initiative]
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
MATD	Ministère l'Administration du Territoire et de la Décentralisation [Ministry of Administration of Territory and Decentralization]
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance

MP	Minis
MPCI	Minis [Min
NGO	Non
OECD	Orga
PACEEQ	Pro; Qua Bas
PACV	Pro; leve
PADSE	Pro;
PDG	Par
PNDH	Pro Hum
PPA	Par
PREF	Pro anc
PRS	Po
PRSP	Po
PUP	Pa
RTI	Re
UN	Un
UNDP	U
UNESCO	U
UNICEF	U
USAID	U

MP	Ministère du Plan [Ministry of Planning]
MPCI	Ministère de la Plannification et la Coopération Internationale [Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation]
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACEEQ	Projet d'Appui Communautaire pour l'Education de l'Equité et Qualité [Community Participation for Equity and Quality in Basic Education]
PACV	Programme d'Appui aux Communautaire Villageoises [Village-level Community Support Program]
PADSE	Projet d'Appui du Développement Socio-économique
PDG	Parti Démocratique de Guinée [Democratic Party of Guinea]
PNDH	Programme National de Développement Humaine [National Human Development Program]
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PREF	Programme de Reforme Economique et Financière [Economic and Financial Reform Program]
PRS	Poverty reduction strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PUP	Parti de l'Unité et du Progrès [Party of Unity and Progress]
RTI	Research Triangle Institute
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

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Chapter One: Overview of Study

Introduction

There was a time when the concept of participation was largely absent from mainstream development. Today, however, it has become a prominent feature of international discourse on progress. Such has been the case in the Republic of Guinea, where recent policy documents say that social and economic progress cannot take place with involving ordinary citizens in the development process (e.g., UNDP 2002a). Trouble is, nobody seems to know exactly what participation really means; the literature is lacking in detailed studies of local participation. Further, there is little evidence that participatory development actually brings about material or social change, despite claims to the contrary (Cleaver 1999). Yet despite these shortcomings, participation in development worldwide continues to spread, seemingly unabated (Henkel & Stirrat 2001). Nowhere has the idea of popular participation been more visible in Guinea than in the education sector,¹ where the state has adopted policies to *decentralize* all aspects of governance (MATD & UNICEF 2004).² In the present study, I examine the multiple, possible meanings of what has come to be called 'community

¹ During the past ten to fifteen years, participatory approaches have become increasingly common in Guinean development discourse, in a number of sectors. These sectors include health care (e.g., ADF 2007), the environment, education (e.g., Aide et Action 2007), and the economy (e.g., UNDP 2007). Examples of the growing emphasis on participation in Guinean development programs include local agricultural collectives and social development initiatives (e.g., IFAD 2007).

² I cite documents marked as co-authored by various Guinean government ministries and donor agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as given, listing the ministry first, throughout the present study. I do this in order to avoid claims about ownership of the ideas within these documents, as well as any claims as to the documents' relative authenticity as genuinely representative of official Guinean government policies, ideas, and so forth.

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participation'³ in Guinean education and development, as a case in the international discourse on progress. Findings in the study show that *participation* and *progress* have been closely linked to one another within development discourse—despite the lack of empirical evidence in support of participatory development.

Much of the literature on participation in education and development examines its theoretical, conceptual, or technical limitations (Kothari 2001)—as the product or process of organized development. Studies of participation have thus generally looked at whether the concept is/is not what the empowering form of development that it claims to be within predominant models or applications (Williams 2004). In other words, the bulk of the literature has examines whether or not so-called 'participatory' approaches actually make for more equitable, democratic, effective, and efficient development outcomes and processes than 'non-participatory' ones. Participatory development has in this respect generally treated power as *reproductive*: as concentrated within what has come to be called the transnational donor community (Kothari 2001) on the one hand, and the state on the other. These models therefore treat power—expressed in terms of things like access to political decision-making processes, material wealth, and quality public schooling—as something that needs to be *redistributed*, from historically centralized to more local levels of management/governance (e.g., McGinn & Walsh 1999). This internationally dominant perspective commonly

³ I use the terms *community* and *local* participation in education interchangeably throughout the study. Both of these terms capture the same conception of participation, defined by given, geographic boundaries—such as a village or other locality. However, I use another common term—*participatory development*—when referring to participation more generally, as applied to all sectors of national and transnational development.

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depicts the local person (i.e., 'citizen') in 'developing' countries as *disempowered*: lacking control over processes of development and governance that directly affect him (Cooke & Kothari 2001). Recent documents on development in Guinea, for example, portray ordinary Guineans as poor and marginalized: lacking access to education and health care, excluded from participation in state/local governance and development policy-making, unable to participate in family and community decisions, and so on (e.g., UNDP 2002a). Yet the literature is lacking in detailed studies of participation as it has actually played out within a given community—as something that is *locally* constituted or defined.

In the present study, I found that the concept of participation within a select locality of Guinea had taken on meanings that did not necessarily correspond to those that have come to dominate international development discourse. I argue that terms such as equity, accountability, efficiency, democracy, and human rights—terms that have come to define participatory development worldwide—have so permeated this discourse that alternative, locally distinct meanings of participation have become nearly invisible. My aim in the present study is to make these meanings visible by examining how *participation* and *progress* have made their presence felt in Guinea, at the most local level.

I examine in the present study the particular, localized meanings of participation and progress in the context of national education reform in Guinea. The site of this ethnographic research is the Medina Primary School⁴ community,

⁴ Medina Primary is a pseudonym used throughout the text to denote the school and school-community site of my research. With the exception of Futa Jaloo, Guinea, and the capital of

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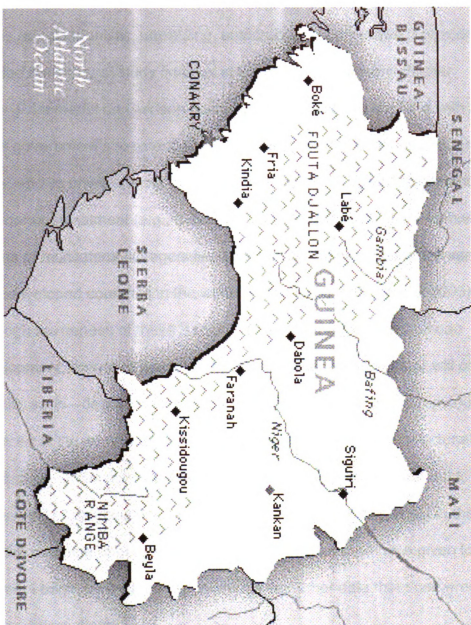
located within the Fuuta Jaloo region of Central Guinea (see figure 1). I then compare these meanings with how the two concepts have come to be portrayed within national/international discourses on development. However, I am not interested in determining whether or to what extent the current reform program has met its objectives of making education more equitable, accessible, more effective, efficient and so forth—although these are laudable goals. Nor am I interested in whether local participation in education reform has been empowering or disempowering, equitable/inequitable, or otherwise conceptually/theoretically sound, and so on—at least, not per se—important though these issues may be. However, as I have said, these aspects of participatory development have also been widely studied in the literature. Rather, I am comparing aspects of meaning associated with participation in order to show how substantially they may vary between and among different levels of discourse on progress.

My findings from the study show that participation and progress have become closely linked to one another at all levels of discourse—local and national/international. However, local meanings that I encountered were particular to their context, in ways that not even the participants themselves could have predicted. Participation within the Medina Primary School community did not simply mean improving school performance, or access to quality education for local children—as it has come to mean within international discourse. Instead, local participation at Medina Primary meant avoiding a loss of face in light of the

Conakry all other place names used in the study are also pseudonyms, in order to protect the identity of research subjects.



Figure 1: Map of Guinea



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potential failure of large numbers of students at the school. This loss of face threatened the school community's image of itself as *worthy* of outside investment and support. These findings are especially important in a case such as Guinea, where the state government has gained a reputation in development circles as opportunistic, unyielding, autocratic and oppressive. I provide a more detailed summary of study findings at the end of the present chapter.

Print media on Guinean politics and development are filled with accounts of the government's resistance to democratic reforms, continued misuse of public funds, and its unwillingness to change—especially in light of significant, long-term donor investment (e.g., BBC 2007; Jeune Afrique 2004).⁵ Meanwhile, reports of multilateral aid agencies have ranked Guinea among the very poorest, least developed countries in the world (World Bank 2006; UNDP 2005). Yet although awareness of these issues is crucial to the study of Guinean development, there are few signs that the political situation there will change anytime soon—despite ongoing, legitimate criticism of the unscrupulous practices of the current regime. Instead of focusing on these unfortunate, though well-known, circumstances directly, however, I have chosen instead to examine one aspect of participatory development that has been neglected in the literature: how the meaning of participation has been constituted within a given local context. I begin by examining documents and other data that I gathered at the national/international level.

⁵ My own experiences of living and working in the country have given me little reason to believe that a thing like citizen participation in Guinean social, economic and political life has been a priority for the national leadership. The current government has historically maintained tight control over everything from news media and education to travel and commerce.

The parameters of the development document that the government came to the United Nations in 1985 of a national overall framework is the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (2002a). The document outlines macroeconomic imbalances (p. 9). Yet despite natural resources, the 2007; Berliner 2007 development intervention

⁴ I use the word, *public*, difficult at times to establish archives of the UNDP say definitively that this is difficult. However, in these document as the detail in Chapter Three. The poverty reduction UNDP Web pages, e.g. publication archives of progress reports, data produced by the Guinean poverty reduction strategy *International Development* 2006). Regardless of Paper of January 2007 document that I located on UNDP Web site) that

Background and context

The parameters of the present study began to appear in Guinean development documents over twenty years ago, shortly after the current government came to power (e.g., MPCl 1986). Recent documents published⁶ by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), describe the introduction in 1985 of a national, comprehensive structural adjustment program “to improve the overall framework for [the nation’s] economic development.” One key document is the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP): Republic of Guinea* (UNDP 2002a). The document says the program was aimed at “reducing macroeconomic imbalances within the context of a liberalized economic system” (p. 9). Yet despite more than a decade of this kind of intervention and abundant natural resources, the country has fallen short of realizing its full potential (CIA 2007; Berliner 2005). The UNDP⁷ documents cited here say that past development interventions in the country have not only left people poor and

⁶ I use the word, *published* here (instead of *produced*) because authorship appears to be difficult at times to establish, particularly in the case of documents that I located on-line in the archives of the UNDP, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Therefore, to say definitively that the UNDP was primarily responsible for the Guinea PRSPs would be difficult. However, in absence of any other information, I have cited the sources/authors of these document as the organizations where I obtained them. I return to this issue in more detail in Chapter Three.

⁷ The *poverty reduction strategy* (PRS) documents that I found for Guinea came from the UNDP Web pages, except for the PRS progress reports, which I located in the World Bank publication archives on-line. The title page of the second (MEF 2006a) and third (MEF 2006b) progress reports, dated January and June of 2006, respectively, says that each was produced by the Guinean Ministry of Economy and Finance. A third progress report on the poverty reduction strategy paper itself, however, says that it was produced by the *International Development Association* (IDA) of the World Bank and the IMF (IDA & IMF 2006). Regardless of their authorship, each report refers to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* of January 2002 as the one adopted by the Guinean government. This is the same document that I located in the UNDP’s on-line archives—the same PRSP document (from the UNDP Web site) that I examine here, briefly, and in greater detail in Chapter Three.

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A close reading of recent documents shows that *participation* in Guinea has been cast as key to a more *inclusive* kind of development, and therefore a more equitable distribution of progress. According to the PRSP, the Guinean government has therefore decided upon widespread participation in the creation and implementation of a comprehensive strategic development plan at all levels of society and governance. The document thus portrays participation as part of a so-called 'new' strategy designed "to place human beings at the center of the development process" (UNDP 2002a, p. 52). This and other recent documents say that including people in this process means having them participate in such things as poverty assessment, policy formulation and the evaluation of development outcomes (e.g., Cagatay 1998; UNDP 2002a). Despite improved national economic growth and school enrollment rates in Guinea, the documents say, continued disparities in access to education, health care and income are signs of what they call "the persistence of poverty" (UNDP 2002a, p. 169) and a state of general *deprivation* affecting marginalized groups of people worldwide (Cagatay 1998; UN 2007). By including the poorest, most marginalized people in these kinds of activities, the documents tell us, both the development process and its outcomes become more equitable and effective.

Documents that I examine in the present study describe popular participation in particular as a necessary component of comprehensive development in Guinea and other countries. According to the Human

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Development Report or the UNDP and the World Bank document, *Participation and the World Bank: Success, Constraints and Responses* (Aycrigg 1998), the primary mission of what they call 'participatory' development is to reduce poverty and other forms of inequality worldwide. *Education* has been described as a key component of this development-for-poverty-reduction approach, which likewise features so-called 'grassroots' participation as an essential element of education reform (e.g., Shaffer 1994; UN 2000; UNESCO 2003).

A primary focus of the present study of participation is the Guinean education reform project, *Community Participation for Equity and Quality in Basic Education* (PACEEQ), which has been funded by the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID). USAID's stated objective for the project "is to improve community participation and gender and rural/urban equity in basic education through increased involvement and competence of civil society, specifically parents' associations ... and [local] alliances" (p. 1, RTI 2004). In the present study, then, I treat this particular Guinean education reform program as an example of the wider, global discourse on development.

According to PACEEQ documents, community participation in education reform in Guinea means rendering children's schooling more responsive to local needs. Schools are supposed to become more responsive, the documents say, as school personnel become more accountable to local communities. Reports on the merits of participation in education reform worldwide say that responsive, accountable schools are supposed to become more accessible to children, especially those from poor families (e.g., Shaffer 1994). Improved equity of

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* According to McGinnis, the project is designed to redistribute functions of education officials, the regular functions of education officials, and the third is devolution, which it devolves functions of education officials to the government. Decentralization has been a government since the 1990s (e.g., UNDP 2002a). The country is moving under a system of "decentralization" in Chapter Three.

access for school-age children throughout Guinea is a stated, fundamental objective of the project. PACEEQ project documents say that Guinean schools in which local people participate deliver higher quality educational services to more children in need of an education. According to one project representative, increased participation means improved access to schooling for families whose children have historically been excluded from education; the historically low enrollment rates among Guinean schoolchildren are, he told me, evidence that parents have been uninvolved, unrepresented in the education process (personal communication, October 8, 2004). Project documents say that PACEEQ aims to empower local people through so-called 'democratic' involvement in the education reform process, as part of a broader plan to decentralize historically centralized state responsibility and authority⁸ over children's schooling.

Central to PACEEQ's technical strategy of empowering local people, project documents say, is the parents' association or APEAE (*Association of Parents and Friends of Students*). The APEAE includes parents and other

⁸ According to McGinn and Walsh (1999) there are three kinds of decentralization, each of which is designed to redistribute the management and/or governance functions of schooling. The first is *delegation*, in which certain tasks such as test administration are referred to regional/local education officials; the second is *deconcentration*, in which the state effectively defers certain, regular functions of education administration such as textbook distribution or salary disbursement; and the third is *devolution*, which entails deferring decision-making authority from the central government to more local levels of control. USAID/Guinea documents say that the agency favors devolution, which it describes as the sole means of re-distributing real power or control over the functions of education/schooling (e.g., Charlick & Lippman 2000).

Decentralization has, according to recent documents, been a stated goal of the Guinean government since the launching of the preceding comprehensive development program in 1986 (e.g., UNDP 2002a). One document published by the Guinean government at the time describes the country as moving from a system of "centralized economic planning" to a "liberal economy" under a system of "decentralized planning" (MPCI 1986, p. 40). I examine this document further in Chapter Three.

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members of the local community, who elect a school governing board⁹ to represent their needs by overseeing school-related activities. This kind of democratic representation in the management/governance of children's schooling is intended, according to project documents, to make school officials become more accountable and responsive to the community and its need for access to quality schooling. According to these documents, parents and other local people are supposed to realize the value of their own participation, the value of children's education, the importance of tracking children's school progress, the power of *civic action* to effect school change and the responsibility that parents and teachers share in helping to ensure children's access to quality schooling.

Significance and rationale

I have chosen to study local meanings of participation (and progress) for two reasons. First, the rural Guinean community is, after all, what development documents that I have examined during the study call the most *marginalized* context in the country. Development documents published within the past fifteen years or so consistently describe people living in *rural* (versus *urban*) areas of Guinea and other developing countries as the poorest, most excluded segments of the world's populations (e.g., UNDP 1990; 1991). These documents cite high rates of illiteracy, poor access to healthcare and education and other aspects of life in rural localities as indicative of what they call the general state of *deprivation* in which rural people live. Second, participatory approaches to development are

⁹ I use the terms *APEAE board* (or simply, *APEAE*) and *school board* interchangeably throughout the present study.

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justified through claims of “greater efficiency and effectiveness of investment and of contributing to processes of democratization and *empowerment*” (Cleaver 1999, p. 597, emphasis added). Development documents claim that participation is therefore key to reversing what they describe as the persistence of *poverty* and other negative development trends in Guinea (e.g., UNDP 2002a) and other developing countries (e.g., World Bank & IMF 2005; UNDP 1998). The present study is especially important for deepening understanding of participatory development, particularly given the historically poor state of governance in Guinea (and other countries) and the ever-increasing prominence of the concept in the discourse on progress worldwide. In this section, I describe the importance and rationale for the present study and research approach.

Despite widespread critique of participation as a viable approach to improving things like community equity and children’s access to quality schooling, the global trend to promote increased local involvement in education reform continues unabated (Cook & Kothari 2001). Popular participation has become particularly visible in poverty reduction strategy documents for developing countries worldwide (e.g., IMF 2004; IMF & IDA 2001). This is certainly true in Guinea, where policy documents cast participation as a means of empowering ordinary citizens through their involvement in poverty assessment and policy formulation (e.g., UNDP 2002a). For example, national programs to enhance local involvement in Guinean education had, at the time of the study, been re-developed, renewed, or expanded following nearly ten years of this kind of reform in school communities throughout the country. Based on these data,

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the strength and reach of this trend does not appear to be waning any time soon—suggesting the need for alternative approaches to research on participatory development.

The present study proposes to deepen understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of participation in education reform and development, but from the perspective of *local* meaning. Findings from the study promise to inform policy and practice as relates to how we have come to conceive of participatory development. By comparing or juxtaposing local meanings of participation against those encountered within national/international discourse, I hope to deepen understanding of the myriad, available meanings (or *rationales*) that have been associated with participatory development. Findings from the study will be published in peer-reviewed journals and disseminated to scholars at the University of Conakry – Guinea, which facilitated site selection and access to documents for this research project.

Review of the literature

One area that the literature on participation in education and development has not adequately explored is the idea of participation as *locally* defined.¹⁰

Instead, the literature focuses on the *universalistic* conception of participation as

¹⁰ Two exceptions are Maclure (1994) and Williams (2004), which both highlight local meaning in participatory education reform. However, Maclure tends to generalize these meanings widely across geographic contexts—describing collective, local participation as a form of reciprocity that he says is common throughout Africa. Williams likewise sees local meaning as significant, yet as the product of interactions with how participation has been defined within international and national-level discourses. These studies are useful because they demonstrate the importance of local meanings in research on participatory development. However, the two studies are also examples of the strong tendency in the literature toward describing participation using terms/concepts that have come to predominate within international/national discourses. Rather than do what Williams has done, I prefer to study local meaning on its own merits. I attempt to draw distinctions/similarities between and among meanings encountered at varying levels of discourse without characterizing local meanings as wholly local, or otherwise.

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a form of empowerment. This perspective is problematic in two respects. First, the resulting models of participatory development assume a *lack* of local involvement in education. People in developing countries are thus characterized as marginalized, lacking access to public services, and therefore as having been excluded from governance and development. This assumption of 'non-participation' in education and other local institutions dichotomizes power relations between *government* (e.g., public schools) and the *governed* (i.e., local people)—placing the two in opposition to one another in a nearly adversarial relationship.¹¹ Second, participatory development as a form of empowerment means that participation is definable only according to a *limited* set of terms and concepts. In the present section, I briefly examine the literature on participatory education reform specifically, and on participatory development in general.

The literature on participatory development has been, variously, critical/supportive of the assumptions underlying predominant models of participation. For example, a widely held conception of participation within global development discourse holds that parents should take more *responsibility* for children's schooling while holding teachers/schools more *accountable* for student performance. Schools and teachers are cast as unaccountable to local people, and therefore ineffective, inefficient and unresponsive to local needs; parents are characterized as (variously) unconcerned, unaware of the importance of schooling, uninformed of their roles in children's education, intimidated by teachers and principles and so on. What the literature does not describe are the

¹¹ In education in the 'West,' this same assumption is present in ongoing debates over state-family responsibility and decision-making, and how the two might be distributed (Vincent 1996).

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ways in which participation actually gets talked about and enacted, and the rationale behind these local meanings—as locally constituted. This is true of the literature on participatory education reform and participatory development more generally.

The literature on participatory education reform

According to the literature on education reform, community participation means improving access to quality schooling by ‘involving’ parents and other local people in school-related activities, engaging them in decisions described as affecting them directly. This perspective on the so-called ‘participative, empowered citizen’ has become common to recent community school projects throughout Africa (e.g., Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder 2002). School councils or governing boards—such as those found throughout Guinea, the APEAEs referred to in the preceding section—are thus typical of participatory approaches to education reform. School governing boards or councils are described in the bulk of the literature (e.g., Gershberg 1999) and PACEEQ documents (RTI 2004) as locally elected—implying a more equitable, democratic redistribution of power between school officials and parents/other members of a given locality. However, these efforts have not always been deemed successful in providing greater power or influence, whether to these elected bodies or the parents/communities they ostensibly represent (e.g., Therkildsen 2001). Whatever the assessment, the policy literature historically has addressed whether or not participation in the case of a particular reform initiative has been effective in achieving a set of stated, projected outcomes—such as empowering local people to effect

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educational change (Williams 2004). These programs are invariably promoted as linked in some respect to projected outcomes of improved equity of access to quality schooling (Reimers 1997). Yet despite the inconsistency of evidence of such outcomes studies to date have not addressed what it is, exactly, that participation has come to *mean*—particularly according to the descriptions of people who are supposed to be doing the participating.

The bulk of the policy literature on international development in education can be described as addressing issues of *efficacy*: whether or not a given reform, strategy, or program truly *works*, and how to improve upon the latter. Studies of community participation in education reform are no exception (e.g., Jimenez & Yasuyuki 1998), including studies of community schools and other kinds of education reform efforts in the Republic of Guinea and other African countries (e.g., Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder 2002; Moulton, Mundy, Welmond, & Williams 2002). However, studies of participatory education reform tend to limit their focus to local participation in children's formal, public school, as has been the case in Guinea. An example is Chapman, Barcikowski, Sowah, Gyamera, and Woode's (2002) study of assumptions about local people's knowledge/capacity to participate in children's education in any meaningful, effective way. This and other studies frequently address the implicit, theoretical linkages often ascribed to community participation. These linkages include the potential of parent involvement to improve school accountability and quality (e.g., Reimers 1997), or to redistribute power more evenly between teachers and the local community (Vincent 1996). These underlying theoretical linkages or assumptions about the

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efficacy, appropriateness, and so forth of participatory education reform have been present in educational discourse in the West for over two decades. More recently, however, these same theoretical linkages have emerged within international discourse on reform in education and other sectors of development.

In education, Wong (1990) identifies two threads within the body of literature on *education decentralization* in the United States and Europe. One thread, he says, is *school choice*, which assumes that parents have both the right and knowledge to select the best educational options for their children. The other thread he identifies as *school site empowerment*, which presupposes that decisions about children's schooling are best left to teachers, parents, and school board members. (This second thread most closely resembles the PACEEQ model of participation.) According to Wong, this trend was fueled by what he describes as growing concerns in the United States and Europe over the perceived inadequacies of centralized management of education on the one hand, and increasing fears over the size of state government.

Plank and Sykes (2003) cite several factors behind what they characterize as a worldwide increase in decentralized models of education: ideological/intellectual shifts over the role of community in education; concerns over equity and parents' rights; issues of efficiency and what the authors call the broad perception of "intrinsic frailties and incapacities of states and governments" (p. 11) to administer/deliver adequate educational services. Community participation models of the kind under study in the present research fall within this decentralization trend—according to the UNICEF research report on

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participatory education reform in Guinea cited earlier in the chapter (MATD & UNICEF 2004). In a survey of this reform trend for the *International Institute for Educational Planning* (IIEP), McGinn and Walsh (2002) say that education decentralization thus calls for a *redistribution* of responsibility and/or authority over education—in order to address the preceding issues or parents' rights, state incapacity, and so forth. Sometimes, the authors say, education decentralization is fueled by a desire toward achieving greater political legitimacy; at other times, however, it is driven by the need to ensure service delivery via other (i.e., local) resources, which the state may lack. Both of these concerns are present in PACEEQ documents and transcripts of interviews with two education specialists associated with the project—one American, the other Guinean. However, although the PACEEQ approach has been to promote shared responsibility for children's schooling among local people, these specialists each emphasized the goals of empowerment. The chief empowerment strategy, according to these specialists, has been to encourage so-called 'civil society' or citizens' groups to *lobby*¹² local/state government toward institutional and political change (personal communication, October 17, 2004; personal communication, August 1, 2005).

Kothari (2001) divides the literature on participatory development more generally into two categories: studies that focus on the "technical limitations" of participatory development; and those that look at the "theoretical and conceptual limitations of participation" (p. 138). Studies within these categories often

¹² The Guinean education specialist I interviewed used the French term, *plaidoyer* [to advocate] to describe PACEEQ's lobbying approach to participation—in which local people might, for example, approach district education officials in order to have a new teacher assigned to a school (personal communication, August 1, 2005). I found this same French term used throughout PACEEQ training materials.

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investigate alternative models of participation by pointing out what they describe as “misguided” (e.g., Maclure 1994, p. 239) or overblown assumptions about, for example, the value of *local knowledge* in guiding education reform policy and practice (e.g., Chapman 2002). This latter assumption, Kothari (2001) adds, is rooted in the idea that development’s beneficiaries have been “marginalized by their separation and isolation from the production of knowledge” (p. 139). Henkel and Stirrat (2001) say that, far from liberating and empowering people, participatory development might actually serve to disenfranchise them even more than so-called outdated, ‘top-down’ development models. Kapoor (2005) argues similarly that what he calls “*our* complicity and desire” to reform the ‘underdeveloped’ world makes participatory development “prone to an exclusionary, Western-centric and inegalitarian (sic) politics” (p. 1204). The literature has thus been increasingly critical of the assumption that participatory development leads to a re-distribution of power between the state, donors, and intended beneficiaries (e.g., Bebbington, Lewis, Batterbury, Olson, & Siddiqui 2007; Cleaver 1999; Kothari 2001). Williams (2004) adds, however, that while such criticism may be valid in some respects, the consequences of participatory development are not predetermined. Whereas he is likewise critical of the participatory approach, he adds that claims of empowerment and critiques of the subjugation of beneficiaries are both over-simplifications of power.

Before continuing, I want to say that I am not opposed to participatory development, *per se*. I tend to agree with Williams’ assertion that the consequences of the approach—empowerment, disempowerment, or something

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in between—are not set in stone. I would say the same, in fact, of any development approach (participatory or otherwise). Rather, I am interested here in highlighting how participation has functioned in a given local context in comparison with its theoretical functioning at the national/international level in Guinea and other parts of the world—as described in recent documents on development and in the literature.

The implications of the possible (i.e., *available*) local meanings of participation in education and development for deepening understanding of this highly pervasive concept in international discourse have, I argue, been overlooked. I say this because of the historically predominant focus in the literature upon issues of efficacy, the theoretical/conceptual underpinnings of participation, its technical limitations and so on. Although research into these aspects of participatory development are important, the literature has largely done so in terms of predominant conceptions of participation present within international discourse. The literature has thus focused upon whether participatory approaches are empowering/disempowering, effective/ineffective, and so on—while subjugating the existence of locally distinct meanings. I therefore argue that studies of how international discourse *defines* participation in a country such as Guinea have little significance in absence of detailed study of how participation has been defined at the most local level. My primary objective, then, is to compare and contrast the meanings of participation that I encountered at the local level with those I encountered in documents and interviews at the national and international level.

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Defining participation and progress

Participation, as the concept has been defined within Guinean policy documents and the literature on participatory development, means local stakeholders taking part in any activities described as supporting or promoting education. Stakeholders are here defined as parents, teachers, school board representatives and other members of what has come to be called the *school-community* within the broader discourse on education reform.¹³ In this discourse, the school community includes both school personnel (namely, the principal and teachers) and residents of the locality or geographic zone that the school is intended to serve. For my purposes, the *community* under study was made up of all of the residents of *Mafoou Quartier*, the geographic zone where Medina Primary School is located.¹⁴ Of course, the concept of community includes local officials and leaders, such as government administrators, religious leaders and members of the school governing board—all of whom were residents of the *quartier* at the time of the study.

Activities in which local community members might participate in Guinea may include, for example, attending parent-teacher meetings, preparing meals for schoolteachers, maintaining the school grounds and helping build a new classroom. However, for my purposes, participation also meant *not* becoming

¹³ When I refer to the school alone, I am referring to the school as representing the *authority* of the state, which is how PACEEQ documents and the literature on community participation in education have characterized the school. In this perspective, the school is cast as the target of change through decentralization (e.g., Chapman et al. 2002). In a word, the school *is* the state—as described within project documents and within the literature.

¹⁴ Throughout the present text, I sometimes use the phrase, “Medina Primary” to refer to the school. I use the same phrase to talk about the entire Medina Primary School community. However, I only use the short-cut phrase when it is clear to which of these I am referring—the school or the school community.

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involved in children's education at all. During the study I allowed for the possibility that some people in the locality might act as *non-participants*. I define these so-called non-participants as people who may (or may not, especially according to local/regional officials, education develop specialists and so forth) understand that their involvement is intended to improve their children's schooling, the importance of schooling to their families and so forth. However, for whatever reason these people may not actually have participated—at least, not in any way that the broader discourse on development would allow. Specifically, I wanted to take into account in designing the present study the possibility that participation was indeed *voluntary*, which is a primary tenet of the contemporary paradigm of so-called 'civil society' participation (Leclerc-Olive 2003). I reason that non-participation does not *necessarily* equate to parents' exclusion from involvement in a child's schooling, nor a child's exclusion from schooling altogether—as one education specialist whom I interviewed claimed (personal communication, May 12, 2005). This may well have been the case in the Medina Primary School community research site and in other parts of Guinea. However, operating under this assumption would seem to leave unexamined other, possible ways of participating/not participating that could have been present within local discourse during the course of the present study. These ideas help to make up the theoretical framework of the study.

Theoretical frame

The theoretical approach to data collection that I use in the present study draws upon the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his concept of the limits of

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possibility (Foucault 1981) in how people describe their own participation in progress. That is, the possible or available ways of participating in education and development are, as with any concept or idea, bound up within *discourse*. For my purposes, discourse consists in both dialogue—written and oral—and activity (Mills 2000). However, whether or not *descriptions* of practice fit with *actual* practice (and vice-versa) has, again, not been my primary concern in the present study. Rather, I have been occupied with studying how people have come to describe participation, especially its underlying rationale or *logic*, within ordinary conversation and activity.¹⁵ What ways of participating are allowed, conceivable and so forth—according to how local people enact and describe their own participation? I then compare these meanings to those underlying the ways in which recent documents characterize participation, focusing on key theoretical ideas that appear there and in the literature.

While the literature on participation in education and development is vast, there are two theoretical concepts that tend to predominate. The first concept holds that *local people know best* the conditions in which they live. The literature thus often describes local people as being in the best position to make decisions about their own educational needs (e.g., Chapman 2002)—and, according to Cooke and Kothari (2001), their circumstances. The participatory approach to poverty assessment in Guinea and other, developing countries (as described in

¹⁵ Michel Foucault might refer to the data collection methods that I am describing in this section as simply a set of *tools* developed for a given (research) purpose. I want to thank Ernest Morrell, Associate Professor of Education at the University of California – Los Angeles for sharing this useful way of thinking about Foucault's work, which inspired how I developed the methodology for the study.

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policy documents that I examine in the study) is infused with this same theoretical idea (e.g., UNDP 2002a; 1998).

A second theoretical idea within the literature on popular participation in education and development says that, as local people become increasingly involved in children's education, school officials become more *accountable* and *responsive* to people's needs. As parents and other community members gain more control over things like teacher recruitment, the payment of teachers' salaries and the monitoring of teacher/student presence in the classroom, teachers and the school principal will be obligated to respond to parents' wishes. This idea is infused with the concept of *ownership*, which implies both authority and responsibility over children's schooling on the part of parents and other local people, as described in PACEEQ and policy documents on Guinean development (e.g., UNDP 2000; World Bank & IMF 2005). These theoretical ideas of participation in education in Guinea and other developing countries are embedded in the current decentralization trend, which seeks to re-distribute power over (and responsibility for) the management/governance of education and other state institutions. Participation, in this perspective, means *empowerment*: redistributing the benefits of development by providing greater authority and responsibility to parents, while ensuring the accountability of school personnel to the former. This idea is fundamental to the discourse on education reform worldwide, including Guinea, according to PACEEQ documents.

According to how UNDP, IMF and World Bank documents examined here describe 'grassroots' participation, the developing local community is located at

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the point farthest from what Foucault (1980) might call the presumed centers of power. By 'centers of power', I mean the sites of state governance, wealth, and other forms of political, social, and economic power. In the context of organized development, these sites would include bilateral and multilateral development agencies, state/regional government, non-governmental agencies, and so on. Ordinary people, or citizens, are thus portrayed within global discourse as having less control and influence over the development process than, say, aid agencies or government ministries, or even local school officials (Cooke & Kothari 2001). Documents such as the PRSP/Guinea (UNDP 2002a), then, describe the beneficiaries of development as poor, marginalized—disempowered. However, these documents differentiate between the poor and the *most* poor, the marginalized and the *most* marginalized, and so forth. In this respect, people living in *rural* areas are portrayed as the poorest, most marginalized of all when compared with those living in *urban* ones—where access to education, health care, education, employment opportunities, and clean water are supposed to be more accessible to people. This idea of urban-rural disparity has been common to global development discourse for decades, upon which organizations such as the World Bank have historically based development policy and strategy.¹⁶ The PRSP/Guinea uses the image of the poor subsistence farmer to convey this

¹⁶ Ferguson (1999) says, in his research on the Zambian Copperbelt and migration patterns in the country, that the World Bank (among other agencies) has long adopted the perspective that urban (i.e., more industrialized) areas of the world have an advantage over rural (i.e., underdeveloped) ones. He explains that this perspective is based upon the assumption that jobs and other economic opportunities are relatively more abundant in cities. However, the author says that his research shows that such assumptions about rural-urban (and urban-rural) migration are at the very least far more complicated, and perhaps entirely false—in which people's reasons for moving from here to there may be only partly driven by economics.

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Farmers in the subsistence food crop subsector appear to be the least well off. This group alone accounts for 68 percent of the poor...These results underscore the need to focus on development of the agricultural sector and rural areas in general in any undertaking intended to reduce poverty (p. 14, UNDP 2002a). This excerpt characterizes the rural citizen as the poorest, most marginalized, and disempowered of development's intended beneficiaries—and therefore as the person most in need of development. This same perspective is present in the bulk of the literature as well.

All too often, the literature on participatory development has treated power as *reproduced* from its centers, where it has ostensibly and historically been centralized. This perspective holds that the poor have remained poor, the marginalized have remained marginalized, and so on because power has remained with aid agencies and the state. Yet power, Foucault (1981) argues, is not permanent, but rather *flexible* and constantly subject to change; it must be studied more regionally or locally, far from its so-called centers, in what he calls its “capillaries” (p. 52). I am therefore interested here in how it is that participation, as an *expression* of power, is constituted *locally*—where it is supposed to take place. How, that is, does participation in education/development express itself within sites far removed—geographically and otherwise—from school district offices, government ministries, and aid agency/NGO offices? In the present study, then, I have chosen to examine

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participation as it is felt at the peripheries of power: among and according to the people within a given rural school-community. Given how development documents have come to describe the poorest, most marginalized segments of the Guinean population, I have been especially interested in studying participation in a locality that might be described as rural, isolated, and far removed from anything associated with social and economic progress. This notion of power as locally expressed is key to the theoretical approach I have taken toward examining several questions of research.

Research questions

The literature on participation, as I said earlier in the previous section, deals primarily with the conceptual, theoretical, and technical limitations of participatory approaches to development. Research of this kind tends, as I said earlier, to treat participation as it has been conceptualized or defined within the broader discourse on development, such as via policy and other documents. Again, the literature is lacking in any examination of participation's more localized meanings—that is, it has not addressed the possibility of pre-existing local conceptions of participation.¹⁷ Rather, research and documents alike assume a largely powerless, unaware, and uninvolved population. I focus instead upon what participation in development and education have come to mean to the people doing the participating—as *defined* within the local context.

From my reading of development documents, participation has been defined in relation to progress. But how has participation been defined in the

¹⁷ Williams (2004), cited earlier in the chapter, is an exception. However, Williams examines participation as a mixture of local/non-local meanings, which differs from my own approach of juxtaposing and comparing meanings across local/non-local data.

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Three research questions guide the present study:

- What does community participation in Guinean education mean, according to documents on education reform?
- What has school-community success come to mean—according to local parents, schoolteachers, school board members, district officials and development specialists working in Guinea education reform?
- What connections, if any, exist between local participation in children's schooling and progress on education reform, according to local people?

Using these questions, I examine how participation has been constituted within the Medina Primary School community—how participation, through local dialogue and action, was expressed during the course of the study. In order to investigate these questions, I examine the discourse on participation in education reform within both national/international and local discourse on development. That is, in order to bring new understandings to the concept of participation, it is helpful to see how participation has been rendered in the local context as juxtaposed against the national/international one.

Data sources and technical approach

The data sources that I used for this study are development documents, ethnographic field notes and interviews. I first used donor agency and government documents on education development to survey the breadth of school reform activity in Guinea. Second, I identified the research site, research subjects and began gathering the ethnographic data. I determined which subjects

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to interview from the emerging ethnographic data. In this section, I briefly describe the sources of data that I used and decisions that I made during the course of the study. These include decisions about the content of the main series of interviews that I conducted with local people, and documents that I collected toward the end of the project. I provide further details on specific data sources, collection, and analysis within subsequent chapters, where I present detailed findings from the present study.

Development documents

I used documents published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Guinean government and the PACEEQ project as primary sources of data for the study. The UNDP documents include the annual *Human Development Report* series for the years 1990-1997, which discuss the concepts of development, poverty and participation that are described in other documents under examination. These other documents include the UNDP's *Gender and Poverty* (Cagatay 1998) report, which speaks to the idea of poverty as a gendered phenomenon. I also obtained a series of UNDP documents¹⁸ called the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – Republic of Guinea* (e.g., UNDP 2002a), which I discussed briefly in a previous section of the present chapter. This series of documents speaks to the idea of participatory development in Guinean social and economic progress. As I said earlier in the chapter, these recent documents describe participation as part of what they portray as a

¹⁸ I found poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) in the on-line publication archives of the UNDP, the IMF, and the World Bank. Above all, I want to note that I have drawn upon PRSPs from a variety of sources in the present study, in order to show the worldwide pervasiveness of PRSP phenomenon and the poverty reduction strategy concept—which do not appear to be limited to any particular region or country, or to any transnational organization.

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significant change in approach from the preceding development plan. These UNDP documents describe how progress is measured and how successful development is supposed to take place, revealing the *rationale* of participation as it has been portrayed within national/international discourse.¹⁹ Complementing these documents are three from the PACEEQ project—the *PACEEQ Internal Mid-term Evaluation* (RTI 2004) cited earlier, quarterly reports of PACEEQ activities, and a series of what the project calls its *success stories*.

Linking the previously referenced documents on Guinean national development with the local context of community participation in education reform is a PACEEQ document entitled, *Community Effort to Improve the Level of Quality and Equity/Gender: Success Story of Medina, Guinea*. The document characterizes what it says are the experiences of people in the research site during the first three months of the project's activities there, in February 2003. The document and the claims it makes about changes in local participation therefore serve to connect the local context of research to the broader, national one—specifically, to the expression of certain theoretical ideas of participation that I have already highlighted. I discuss each of these documents and the rationale for selecting them in the individual findings chapters.

Ethnography and interviews

My chief task in the ethnographic piece of the study has been to collect data on how success (i.e., progress) has been defined or portrayed within local

¹⁹ Whereas the bulk of the documents I examine in this study were published after 1984, when current-president Lansana Conté took power, I do not assume that national development only 'began' during this period. I will take up the history of development in the country in more detail in the second chapter.

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dialogue and activity, and on the role that participation has played in successful education reform. How people referred to themselves, for example, as involved/uninvolved in their children's education was one way that I operationalized²⁰ my research questions. I began by examining the particular set of claims that the Medina Primary School Community success story made regarding local progress in achieving PACEEQ's main objective of improved community participation in children's schooling. How did local people describe their involvement in education in relation to these claims? I employed both interviews and participant observation to address this question; I also attended a number of meetings of APEAE members, parents and teachers, the APEAE governing board and other local officials and community members during the yearlong study. I interviewed parents, officials and other research subjects, which I selected according to the criteria given below.

One meeting of parents, teachers and APEAE board members, which took place some seven months into the project, yielded an especially rich set of data. These data shaped the content of most of the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that I conducted for the study. However, instead of treating these data as singularly important to my findings, I used the data from the meeting and subsequent interviews to highlight the two broader themes or concepts of progress and participation. These two concepts have dominated local/regional

²⁰ By *operationalized*, I mean that the research questions needed to be put into a form in which I could address them directly through data collection. For example, asking what education *means* according to local people might translate to asking local people to describe how their children came to be enrolled (or not) in the local primary school—which would provide insight into the significance attributed to schooling within local discourse.

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² Glaser and Strauss means of theory-generation is thus described "a generated from robust and justified in terms which diverged from receptive to emergence is not a direct application resembles the one." Similarly, Geertz the researcher develops the author adds that, but be abandoned as such

discourse since I began the site selection process, which I describe in the following section.

I identified the Medina Primary School community site from PACEEQ project documents, where I collected the ethnographic data for the study. I supplemented this data with interviews, which focused on locally emerging threads or themes, such as progress. This approach to data collection resembles Glaser's (2005)²¹ grounded theory approach, in which data and the theoretical ideas guiding my own data collection were continually emerging throughout the course of this study. Clarke (2005) similarly describes this approach in her own variation on grounded theory, in which "the situation [under study] per se becomes the ultimate unit of analysis, and understanding its elements and their relations is the primary goal." This approach allowed me to flexibly focus data collection and analysis on specific events, time periods, culture, places, institutions. I was thus able to adapt the methodological frame of the study to emerging data as appropriate, reworking/redeveloping theory as I went.²² I continued collecting data in this manner through the first few months of

²¹ Glaser and Strauss (1967) have been credited with developing grounded theory, as a means of theory-generation in social science research, including education. Grounded theory is thus described "as a problem-oriented endeavor in which theories are *abductively* (sic) generated from robust data patterns, elaborated through the construction of plausible models, and justified in terms of their explanatory coherence" (Haig 2004, p. 1). Glaser's later work, which diverged from that of Strauss, emphasizes the need for the researcher to remain receptive to emergent theory from a variety of data sources (Glaser 2005). Although my work is not a direct application of grounded theory, per se, this later perspective most closely resembles the one that inspired my approach toward data collection.

²² Similarly, Geertz (1983; 1973) points out that anthropological data collection requires that the researcher develop a working theory to fit the particular needs of her (sic) research. The author adds that, because such theories are specific to a given research project, they must be abandoned as soon as they outlive their usefulness.

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ethnographic data collection, tacking back and forth²³ between data and theory, theory and data, in order to decide what to focus upon and how during the course of the study. The usefulness of this approach is most apparent in the presentation of findings in later chapters, in which certain events (e.g., meetings with parents) became more important to me than others for studying local meanings of participation.

In the present study of the meanings of *participation*, I examine what local people describe as *possible* ways of participating—those they describe as viable and available to them, as necessary, appropriate, important, desirable and so forth. I used the same approach to studying local meanings of progress. For example, during the first site visit to Medina Primary School, one member of the site selection team lauded what he called its excellent track record of following district procedures and demands, saying that the school community was always up to district standards in this respect. I drew upon these events, dialogue and activity to discern patterns in how people described Medina Primary School, Mafou Quartier, and their own participation in local progress. Using the approach described above, I developed particularized, flexible theories of my own about local meanings of progress and participation—which guided my ongoing data collection. Initially, I developed these theories during the site selection process, in which particular conceptions of participation and progress were present in documents and field notes I collected during site selection.

²³ I want to thank Lynn Fendler, Associate Professor of Education at Michigan State University for this helpful metaphor.

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Site and participant selection

I identified the Medina Primary School community as the focus of my research from documents on participation in education in several localities within Guinea's Fuuta-Jaloo region. I used three main criteria to select the research site, assisted by representatives of the district education office and the area parents' associations. I asked them to take part in site selection because it was around these two entities—the public school system and the APEAE—that the PACEEQ project had been organized. Following site selection and preliminary data collection, I identified and recruited research subjects according to another set of criteria. In this section, I describe these criteria and the processes I followed for selecting the ethnographic research site and subjects for the present study.

Site selection

The first criterion of site selection involved identifying a reform project in which *improved* (i.e., increased) local participation in education was a stated, principal objective. This was the case with PACEEQ.²⁴ The second criterion involved identifying a school community that had hosted such a participatory education reform project for at least a year prior to my arrival—and whose activities there were still ongoing. PACEEQ continued to work with the school and community during the period of data collection; project representatives and school district officials visited or communicated with the Medina Primary School

²⁴ The *French Cooperation*,⁹ the bilateral donor agency of the French government, was financing a project similar to PACEEQ at the time of the present study. However, since the latter project was active in only one district in the region, and project personnel and documents were relatively inaccessible, I decided to work with the USAID-backed PACEEQ project.

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and community members on a regular basis. Third, and most importantly, the research site had to be identified in one or more documents as *successful* in improving local participation. The document, *Community Effort to Improve the Level of Quality and Equity/Gender: Success Story of Medina, Guinea* that I cited earlier in the chapter makes such a claim about PACEEQ's work with members of the Medina Primary School community. Specifically, I was looking for a site in which written claims were being made about *changes in local participation, as an express outcome of reform*.

In addition to following the preceding criteria, I chose Medina Primary School community as the research site for several other reasons. First, there were a number of economic, vocational, and educational opportunities available to local school-age children and adults. These opportunities included fabric dyeing and potato farming,²⁵ which I mentioned earlier in the chapter. PACEEQ's ongoing activities in the local area also included adult literacy classes and environmental education programs at Medina Primary School; other, area non-governmental organizations were sponsoring local literacy and technical training programs as well. In other words, there were a variety of economic and formal/non-formal educational activities in which local people and their children could participate—in addition to public schooling. This criterion allowed me to study a wide range of practices and perspectives on education. Second, with an enrollment of 171 students, there were also sufficient numbers of parents and

²⁵ Some of these activities were sponsored by other, more regional non-governmental organizations, not PACEEQ.

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Finally, I selected the Medina Primary School community as the primary site because of its location. The school was situated within a subdivision, or (in French) *quartier* [borough],²⁶ of a major Guinean city of the Fouta Djallon region. Yet from all appearances and local descriptions, Medina Primary was a distinctly *rural* school: relatively isolated from nearby towns, located several kilometers outside of the City of Kankan—situated along a solitary, unpaved road. This road was essentially the only way into or out of the *quartier*, which district-level²⁷ education officials referred to as *inaccessible*. The *quartier* consisted in farm fields, streams and footpaths. Unlike the other, prospective sites that I visited prior to site selection, there was no general market in Medina Quartier. In fact, the only social ‘centers’ within this community were the local mosque, located about one kilometer away from the school, and the school itself. This was, in effect, about as rural as a school community could get.

According to recent development documents examined in the present study, including the PRSP/Guinea (UNDP 2002a), the rural school community was where the most marginalized, poorest, and needy people of the world lived. Again, I wanted to study how people located farthest from the so-called centers

²⁶ I use the French term, *quartier*, throughout the text instead of its closest English equivalent.

²⁷ The French colonial administration had divided Guinea into regions, *préfectures* [prefecture] and *sous-préfectures* [sub-prefectures], as well as *quartiers* (in the case of urban centers) and sectors. I use the term school district (or district) instead, however, for simplicity’s sake. The U.S. concept of the school district is the geographic/administrative unit of the education system that most closely resembles the *préfecture*, even though the French word has a more-or-less direct equivalent in English, as I have already given here. Both the U.S. school district and the Guinean *préfecture* consist of multiple schools, have their own administrative departments at all levels (e.g., elementary), and so forth. However, for my purposes, any functional similarity between the two systems—U.S. and Guinean/Francophone—ends there.

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Among the school communities visited, the Medina Primary School community was an anomaly, a paradox. As I said in the preceding section, the school was located in what appeared to be a rural area, but within the municipal zone of a major Guinean city. Here was a school that was *technically* urban, but *physically* rural, surrounded by agricultural land. Local descriptions confirmed this paradox. During the first site visit, for example, both local people and the other members of the site selection team described the area as isolated, underdeveloped and in *need*. Although other locales could have served as adequate research sites, it was this claim to being a rural school community in an urban zone that led me to select the Medina Primary School community as the primary research site. The rural/urban phenomenon—in which rural areas are described as *underdeveloped* with respect to urban ones—has been a key feature of development discourse in Guinea and other countries for decades.

In selecting the Medina Primary School community, I was not looking for a research site that would be somehow *representative* of the typical, rural Guinean school community. Rather, my objective in selecting such an anomalous site was to see how concepts such as rural and urban have come to figure in local meanings of participation and progress. People and documents described Mafou

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as rural, which according to international/national and local discourses was the kind of community most in need of participatory development/education reform. I reasoned that the Medina Primary School community's designation as a part of an urban (i.e., less marginalized) locality, juxtaposed against its rural (i.e., underdeveloped) appearance and the characterizations of local people would allow me to examine the assumptions underlying key concepts of participation, rural/urban, developed/underdeveloped and so on that have become so prominent within the wider discourse on participation and progress. Geertz (1983) has used the same kind of strategy in his own analyses of the field of law, anthropology, and others, in order to examine the often multilayered meanings of seemingly run-of-the-mill concepts. My purpose was the same as Geertz's: not to be able to generalize findings to other contexts, but rather to deepen understanding of key concepts and the space they have come to occupy in international discourse on progress.

In selecting a research site, I have not been so interested in examining *outcomes* of local participatory education reform, per se. Rather, I have been focusing on variations in practice, and ways of talking about practice, within local dialogue and activity. What changes or progress was the *Medina Success Story* document claiming had taken place? How did these claims compare with how participation and success were being characterized in local, daily conversation and activity? Initially, then, my primary task following site selection was to investigate the claims made in the success story document—and the general claim of the successful, participatory, rural community first and foremost.

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Site description

The Medina Primary School is located within what is known in the French language as a *quartier* [neighborhood] of a major metropolitan area of the Fuuta-Jaloo region of Central Guinea. Composed chiefly of farming and grazing land for cattle and other livestock, the Mafou is one of fourteen *quartiers* that make up the City of Satimbé. The *quartier* is located about ten kilometers from the city center and comprises four sectors: Dalla; Kouliman; Balikabé; and Ganyankobé (see figure 2). The primary mosque is located on a small hillside in Dalla, where many of the local notables live. Just adjacent and to the southeast of the sector is Kouliman, which is inhabited by the descendants of former slaves and situated on a downward slope from Dalla²⁸ and the mosque. Kouliman borders a stream that passes through all four sectors of the *quartier*. The elementary school was located to the south of Dalla; beyond the school, further south still, was the sector of Balikabé. Farmers and trades people, such as brick makers and tailors, inhabited the sector.²⁹ Beyond and adjacent to both Balikabé and Dalla, to the northwest, is situated the sector of Ganyankobé. Generations of masons have inhabited Ganyankobé and farmers. A second mosque is also located in this sector.³⁰

²⁸ One of the interpreters (and research subjects) on the study commented that, generally speaking, the notability or upper classes had, since before colonial times in Guinea, occupied the higher elevations. Lower elevations, especially lands located along rivers and streams, are where the descendants of former slaves lived. Although not universally true, members of the latter caste usually are among the poorest people in the country.

²⁹ Professions are often associated with social status in the Fuuta-Jaloo of Guinea, as in other regions of the world. This association is not universal, however. Rather, the professions of research subjects will serve here only as a status indicator, which can then help in subsequent analyses of ethnographic data.

³⁰ The mosque in the Village of Ganyankobé was, however, not “sanctioned” by the district-level chapter of the governing body, the Islamic League. The regular Friday afternoon prayer, the one

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The local elementary school was located near the juncture of two sectors, Dalla and Balikabé (see figure 2).³¹ It consisted of two buildings, located side-by-side, of two classrooms each. During the year of the study the larger of the two buildings housed the first- and sixth-grade classes of 90 and 28 students, respectively. The smaller building housed the fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms of 24 and 32 students. There were a total of 174 students enrolled in the school, 92 of which were girls. There were four full-time teachers (including the school principal, who taught the sixth grade), one temporary teacher and a part-time tutor hired to help prepare sixth-grade student-candidates for the national seventh-grade exam, the examination for entry into junior high school in Guinea. All of these teachers (with the exception of the temporary teacher)³² served as research subjects for the study.

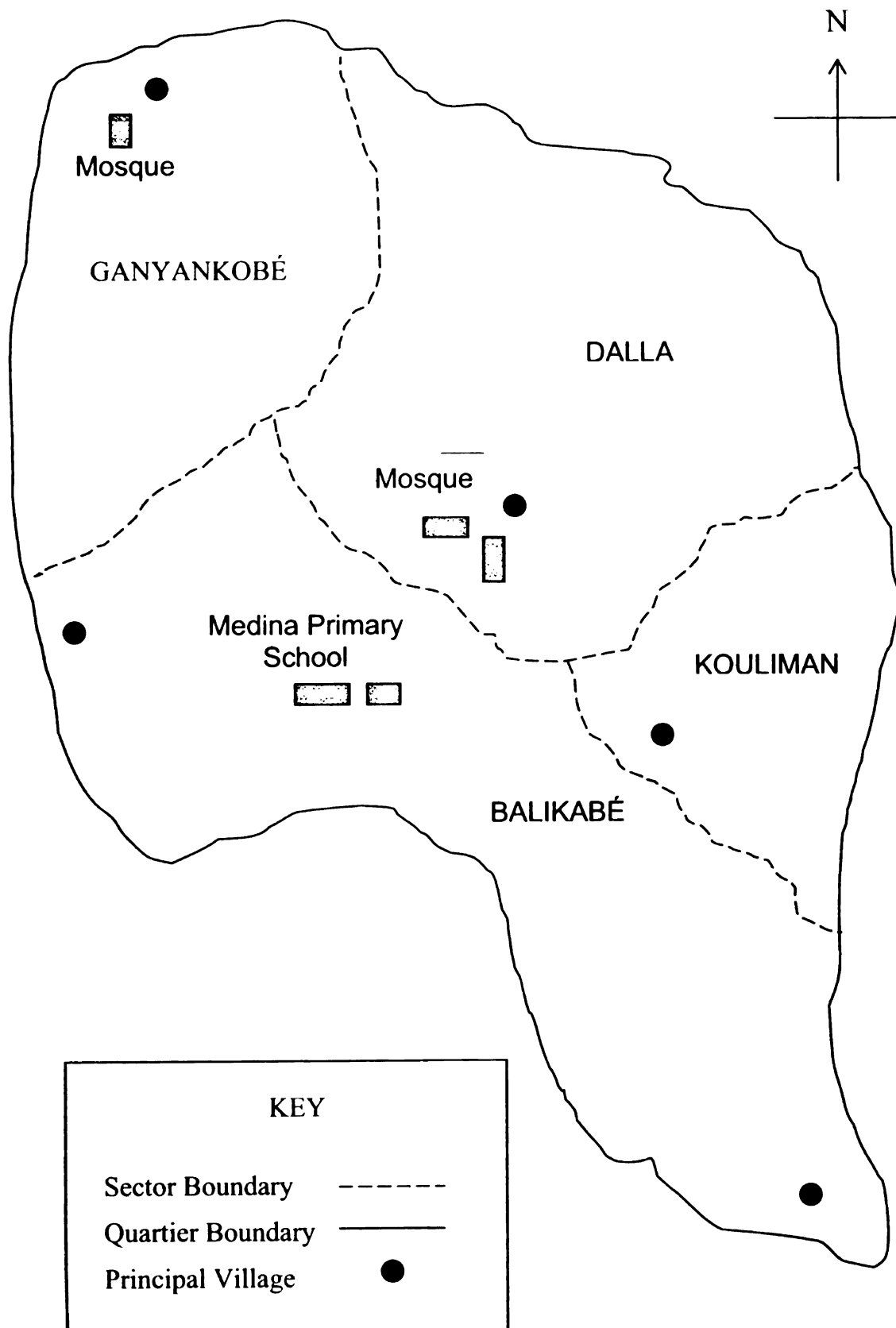
Schools throughout Guinea have historically been organized at the level of each prefecture, which I am treating in this study to be the equivalent of a school *district* in the United States; Guinea's APEAE's and their governing boards,

most sacred and important in the practice of Islam, could therefore not be held at the Ganyankobé mosque. Research subjects living in the sector explained that the league wanted certain improvements to be made to the physical structure of the mosque, such as the installation of ceiling tiles, before the building could be approved for Friday prayers. Sector residents participating in this study said that they attended Friday prayers either at the Dalla mosque or at a mosque located in a neighboring community outside of the quartier.

³¹ According to the director of the local adult literacy classes and acting vice-president of the local APEAE, the school was originally founded at the intersection of four communities—the founding communities of this particular geographic region, which were eventually included within the same quartier. Three of these communities were located in Balikabé Sector; the third, Dalla, was located in Dalla Sector. This information is noted here to document an apparent attempt to build the school in a place that was more or less shared, and equidistant, from each of the founding communities of the future quartier. Ganyankobé only became part of the same school community later on, when quartier boundaries were re-drawn in the mid-1980s, following the installation of the current national government. The case of Ganyankobé and its “membership” in this and other quartiers, as relates to the participation of residents of this sector in education, will be taken up in more detail in a later chapter.

³² The temporary teacher was hired to replace one of the four, full-time teachers on medical leave, shortly after I began my research in Mafou Quartier.

Figure 2: Map of Mafou Quartier
(Medina Primary School community)



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whose members are locally/regionally elected, have been organized accordingly. The elementary school cycle itself in Guinea is composed of six grade levels; however, many schools throughout the country did not have the full complement of six classrooms, and so were obliged to rotate students through the available classrooms as space and personnel allowed. When students from the third grade progressed to the fourth, their teacher would go with them; however, if there were no second-grade students advancing to the next grade, then there would be no third grade class taught at all that year. This was the case at Medina Primary School, which had only the four regular classrooms and teachers noted here. The lack of two classrooms therefore meant frequent enrollment gaps from one year to the next. In fact, there were no second- or third-grade students enrolled or attending classes at Medina Primary School at the time of the study.³³ According to the school principal, students in the first grade had had to remain in the first grade that year (2004-2005) for lack of an available teacher and classroom to take on an advancing group of second-graders (personal communication, May 3, 2005). Yet judging from the size of the local population

³³ There were two ways in which Guinean schools with limited classroom capacity have tried to accommodate a surplus of local students. Some schools operated on a multi-grade system, in which one specially trained teacher would instruct students at two different grade levels, simultaneously. For example, one teacher might be responsible for both fifth- and second-grade students, who would share the same classroom. Other schools operated a 'double session'. This approach was supposed to allow schools to run what amounted to a second shift, in which teachers would return to the school in order to accommodate a surplus of students. In this scenario, teachers would teach two sets of students at a given grade level—one group in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Medina Primary School did not use either of these approaches.

In my experience as a teacher trainer in Guinea, educators were often reluctant to adopt the multi-grade classroom model. The double session approach, however, appeared to be more common—as a means of multiplying a school's capacity without adding additional classrooms, personnel, or provide the training required for the multi-grade model. More than likely, Medina Primary was unable to adopt the latter model, since its teachers lived some distance away from the school, outside of Mafou Quartier.

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¹⁴ Taxis generally stop at the small bus stop from the bridge, carrying people close to the river basin. Drivers frequently of the river basin the other member doubts prior to our river bridge (pers. of how local people other transportation figure important).

and school enrollment records, Medina Primary easily had enough school-age children to fill at least another two classrooms.

Medina Primary School served some fifteen villages located within the Mafou Quartier, all connected by a series of narrow, unimproved roads, trails and footpaths. Few cars found their way into the community; only bicycles and motorcycles. However, there were taxis into and out of the area on a daily basis. These taxis arrived in Mafou Quartier most every morning, at a pick-up point located a mile from the school, and took passengers into the city center—returning late in the afternoon.³⁴ Farm fields of mainly potatoes, rice and corn occupied the vast majority of the available land space located within Mafou's borders, lining the main road into the *quartier*. Vegetable gardens lined the river bottom that flanked Kouliman and Ganyankobé Sectors, tended by residents. Located near the school was a closed water pump, from which most of the people living in the adjacent communities—namely, Dalla and Kouliman Sectors—got water for drinking and cooking.

Across sectors and groups throughout the *quartier*, people either farmed on their own land or borrowed land for producing corn, rice, potatoes and other agricultural products; some of the produce was sold in the city center, some was

³⁴ Taxis generally did not make it as far as the school and neighboring communities, preferring to stop at the small bridge along the main road into the *quartier*. Passengers either walked to and from the bridge, or, if they had the means, paid additional money to the taxi drivers as incentive to bring people closer to the school—near where the bulk of the local population lived. The taxi drivers frequently complained, according to local people, about the difficulty of scaling the banks of the river basin to reach the school. One member of the site selection team, who was to drive the other members and me to Medina Primary School for my first visit there, had expressed doubts prior to our departure about whether or not his car would be able to make it over the river bridge (personal communication, November 22, 2004). I note these comments here because of how local people would later describe Mafou Quartier as rural and *isolated*, citing these and other transportation issues (personal communication, November 22, 2004). These descriptions figure importantly in study findings, which I present in detail in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

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reserved for household use. Most every family living in the *quartier* subsisted, at least in part, from its own agricultural production.³⁵ Every woman living in the *quartier* worked directly in the fields in some respect, regardless of her age, social, or financial status; this was true of some, but not all of the men. Women, and women exclusively—from most every family, again across sectors and status groups—were also involved in dyeing fabric. Some of these women worked collectively; others did not. The dyed fabric was sold in the city center, in a variety of patterns, for making clothing.³⁶

It is worth noting, finally, that the vast majority of people living throughout Mafou Quartier were described in local conversation as functionally illiterate. That is, most of the local people were portrayed as incapable of speaking, reading, or writing in French, Guinea's official language and the medium of instruction in the country's public schools. The local (and most widely used) language in the Fuuta-Jaloo region was Fulfulde/Pular, encountered in everyday conversation and at community gatherings held at the mosque, school, or elsewhere within the *quartier*. Adult literacy classes sponsored by several organizations, including PACEEQ, thus taught local adults to read and write exclusively in their mother tongue of Pular, not the official French language.

³⁵ Potatoes were the crop most commonly and widely produced for re-sale throughout the *quartier*, where some residents were organized in farm collectives to plant, harvest, and market their produce. In conversations with local people, potatoes were said to bring the greatest margin of profit. The widespread production of this crop, especially collectively, figures prominently in data analyses of a later chapter.

³⁶ The indigo-dyed fabric produced throughout the Fuuta-JalooFuuta-Jaloo of Guinea is known as *lepi* (Pular), and considered to be one of the signature cultural artifacts of the region—worn at one time or another by most every one in the region. Women living in the *quartier* all wore roughly the same kind of fabric in pattern and quality that they themselves produced, using the same basic materials of white (imported) Chinese cloth called (in French) *bazin* [damask] and indigo dye.

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Before describing the criteria used to select local research subjects for the present study, I want to note the role that members of the site selection team played in the selection process—specifically, by making known their assessments of prospective sites. However, their comments before, during, and following visits to potential sites involved little, if any, discussion of the qualities of an appropriate research site. Rather, they instead described the qualities of what they characterized as a *good* (i.e., participative) or *bad* (i.e., non-participative) school community.

Like the *Medina Success Story*, district-level officials described the characteristics of the *successful* school community throughout the site selection process. Specifically, these officials described what they portrayed as the character of participation in the prospective research sites we visited. Officials talked about which members of the school-communities visited were/were not actively involved in school affairs, and so on, according to what members of the site selection team deemed to be appropriate/inappropriate behavior for people who were supposedly dedicated to supporting their local school and teachers. I ultimately drew upon these conversations when selecting the Medina Primary School community as the site of my ethnographic research. Further, local people themselves characterized this school community as isolated, undeveloped, and inaccessible during the first site visit. Taking account of these appraisals by district-level education authorities and local community members themselves allowed me to identify and investigate exactly what characteristics were being associated with the concepts of participation and progress within local/regional

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discourse. Information gathered during these site visits therefore proved to be valuable data in and of itself, as part of the complex set of local meanings of community participation in education and development.³⁷

Research subject selection

I used several criteria to select local research subjects for the present study. First, since documents on participatory education reform in Guinea emphasize the participation of parents, the APEAE, and teachers in children's schooling, I selected research subjects from these three groups. Parents, however, have been the main focus of Guinean discourse on participatory education reform, including the PACEEQ project—and were therefore the most important subjects during data collection. Second, equity of access has been a key concept in education reform in Guinea, as described in a number of PACEEQ and UNDP documents. The PRSP/Guinea, for example, is filled with references to how the poor, residents of rural areas, women and girls, and members of other groups of people in the country have historically lacked access to schooling and suffer from high rates of adult illiteracy (UNDP 2002a). Participation has thus been portrayed within local and national discourse as a matter of promoting *girls' schooling* and that of *rural children* above all other groups. To examine claims to linkages between participation and progress,

³⁷ During a taped interview some months later, the APEAE official who had recommended adding Medina Primary to the short list of sites to be visited confided that he had promoted its selection in the hopes that I would use any influence I may have had with the U.S. government and/or non-governmental organizations to help the community to improve local school infrastructure. He told me that he saw the school was in need of additional classrooms; but he also said that the community did not have the necessary resources for school expansion. Further, it is important to note that this same official had recommended visiting the Medina Primary School community over another, prospective site that I had already identified, which was located within the same urban area—though much closer, as it happened, to the city center.

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then—as depicted in national-level reform documents—I therefore selected research subjects from four groups of parents: those with school-age children who were enrolled in school; those with school-age children who were not enrolled; those with school-age girls enrolled in school; and those with school-age girls who were not enrolled in Medina Primary School.

A third criterion for selecting research subjects had to do with how participatory education reform in Guinea has been organized, according to PACEEQ and Guinean government documents, around the national system of local parents' associations, or APEAEs. The APEAE governing board of the Medina Primary School consisted of nine members, all of whom had been locally elected. Since the board included two representatives from each of the four geographic sectors of Mafou Quartier (in addition to the board president), I selected local parents to participate in the study accordingly, or four per sector. I also recruited APEAE board members as research subjects—at least one each in three of the four sectors—plus the board president and acting vice-president.³⁸

Finally, to best connect data collected from parents with school-level data, I wanted to select parents whose children were taught by the schoolteachers who were likewise involved in the present study. However, since I later recruited all five of the teachers working at Medina Primary School—four regular classroom teachers, including the principal, and another teacher engaged as a private tutor

³⁸ Since the APEAE board president and vice-president both resided in the same village, I ended up recruiting a total of *three* board members from within the same geographic sector of Mafou Quartier. I likewise tried to recruit a member of the APEAE board from each of the remaining three sectors; however, I was successful in only two of the three, for a total of five of nine board members participating in the study.

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to sixth-grade students—all parents recruited for the study met this criterion.³⁹ (This group of teachers included both male and female schoolteachers of varying levels of experience, as well as teachers with and without children of their own.) Additionally, many (if not all) of the recruited parents, had enrolled their children in local Qu’ranic school or with a Qu’ranic tutor—whether in the place of, or in addition to, enrolling them in formal public school. To capture this important aspect of (religious) education, I decided on site to include two local *imams*—religious leaders, who were both parents of children enrolled at Medina Primary and teachers of the Qu’ran—in the study.

Findings summary and study organization

Just as the documents examined here describe successful education reform as connected to popular participation, local discourse and activity point toward the same conclusion—albeit in different ways. What is most significant in my reading of international/national level documents is how participatory development has come to be described (and *describable*) as essential to progress. These documents describe participation in development in a way that makes the latter appear somehow better than the dominant development model of some twenty or so years ago—at least, as this model has been characterized within the documents themselves. I discuss these data sources and findings in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four, in which I present a reading and analysis of documents on participation in Guinean national development.

³⁹ Some local residents had enrolled their children in schools outside of Mafou Quartier—especially those who lived at the extreme boundaries of the zone, far from Medina Primary School. I recruited several parents for the study who had children who were attending school in other districts. However, I managed to recruit at least four parents with children enrolled at Medina Primary from within each of the four sectors, as principal research subjects.

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In Chapter Three, I look at how select documents on Guinean comprehensive development have come to characterize participation as a kind of normal, logical, necessary, desirable and promising response to the so-called 'failings' of prior, so-called 'top-down' development approaches of the 1980's. In Chapter Four, I examine documents, interview transcripts and other data on the phenomenon of the *success story* in international discourse—as evident in PACEEQ and other development initiatives worldwide. These data speak more directly to assumptions about how increased participation in education reform is supposed to achieve reform outcomes in Guinean education. Chapter Four thus aims to build upon Chapter Three by providing a more detailed analysis of how participation has come to be portrayed as a kind of indicator of *progress* within discourse on Guinean education development—and the ways in which it has thus become possible to describe participation as a highly effective component of education reform. Taken together, Chapters Three and Four address how we have come to describe participation as we do in wider national/international discourses: as a necessity on the one hand, and as an indicator of progress toward achieving tangible education reform goals on the other.

Juxtaposed against the findings that I present in Chapters Three and Four, findings in Chapters Five and Six focus on the particularized, local meanings of progress and participation. Chapter Five focuses on how progress has come to be described by members of the Medina Primary School community and district-level officials, including parents, school board members, and teachers and other school personnel. Findings from this chapter show that progress has been

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subject to how local people described Mafou Quartier's seemingly ambiguous rural-urban status. According to local people, what they described as a lack of progress in the *quartier* somehow reflected a lack of *effective* participation. By *effective*, I mean participation that, according to local officials, would provide access to resources available only in Central Satimbé. These resources including building materials and equipment for improving the *quartier's* roads and other infrastructure. Yet participation of this kind tended to set limits on local potential for progress, according to the findings I present in Chapters Five and Six. Just as participatory development—as portrayed in documents examined in Chapters Three and Four—is supposed to foster local self-sufficiency, people of Mafou Quartier characterized participation as meaning *self-reliance* and *autonomy*. Yet the reasons people gave to justify their expressed need for self-reliance tended to reinforce their sense of the *quartier's* status as rural, undeveloped, and isolated. This sense of isolation was most profoundly felt, according to findings presented in Chapter Five, in the Sector of Ganyankobé in Mafou Quartier. It is in light of the findings presented in Chapters Five and Six that findings from Chapter Seven became the most significant in the entire study.

Findings presented in Chapter Seven show how local parents, officials, and teachers portrayed school-community progress at Medina Primary according to their own assessments of their assumed roles in children's upbringing. As I said earlier, the school community's image of itself, as worthy of outside investment in local development, seemed to depend upon the success/failure of a predominantly female sixth-grade class at the year-end national exams. There

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was a strong sense of what local people described as the very real threat of failure on the upcoming exam—which in Guinea was used a primary indicator of school performance. What I did not say, however, was that this threat only became visible during an impromptu meeting of parents, teachers, and school board members to discuss the actions of a group of truant, sixth-grade students. The students' potential failure therefore threatened, according to local descriptions of their recent behavior, the community's chances of becoming something more than its imagined status as a historically rural, undeveloped locality seemed to suggest. As I said earlier in the present chapter, such a failure meant exposing Medina Primary's most significant shortcoming: that the school was somehow *incomplete*, lacking the classroom capacity (i.e., infrastructure) of what local people had described as a *normal* Guinean elementary school. Short on space and personnel to offer classes at all six grade levels in the Guinean elementary school cycle, the school was—as local people portrayed it—not 'normal'. The sixth-grade students therefore *had* to succeed come exam time—according to local descriptions—or students throughout the school could not advance to the next grade level. Such a failure would thus mean that large numbers of school-age children would subsequently be left out of the classroom the following year, due the lack of class space and teachers to accommodate them all. Failure on the sixth-grade exam therefore risked exposing the Medina Primary School community's inherent inability to provide access to education for all school-age children living within the community.

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As local people characterized matters within the Medina Primary School community, they could ill afford the failure of the sixth-grade class and the loss of its perceived image as 'first in line' with district-level education officials. These officials, APEAE board members told me, ultimately decided which schools within the district would benefit from donor and NGO investment. Participation, then, meant avoiding the loss of this first-in-line status—in which local accountability for the school's (potential) failure drifted back and forth between parents, teachers, and APEAE board members.

The cumulative findings of the present study therefore suggest that commonplace concepts such as responsibility, accountability and ownership—as historically used to define participatory development within national/international discourse—did not adequately address the complex ways in which participation actually played out in a given local context. There was, in fact, so much slippage in how or whether parents, teachers and school board members actually took ownership, became more accountable and so forth throughout the study that it was hard at best to tell who was participating in what at Medina Primary—much less with what outcomes. Most telling here was how people's sense of local participation, accountability, fear of failure, and strong sense of shame over students' recent actions were inevitably concomitant with one another. This study therefore presents a set of findings on meanings of participation and people's roles in school-community progress that was wholly unaccounted for in either the national/international documents I examined or the existing literature. In Chapter

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Chapter Two: Historical Background and Context

Alone among the former French African colonies, Guinea rejected membership in the new alliance and voted instead for complete independence (Nelson, Dobert, McLaughlin, Marvin, & Whitaker 1975, p. 1).

Introduction

My aim in the present chapter is to give a brief summary of the history of Guinean politics, society and development. I am not attempting to provide a historical analysis, per se. Rather, I want to provide a historical context for the findings I present in later chapters. Achieving this aim means pointing out certain patterns in the historical dialogue on development in the country. Most important for my purposes is how various historical texts describe a Guinean nation, past and present, as one that has thus far fallen short of realizing its apparently significant potential for achieving social and economic progress. This image is juxtaposed against the image of the country's current instability and economic hardship on the one hand, and a deeply rooted pride in its historic declaration of total independence on the other.

According to my own experiences and print/on-line texts, Guinea has developed an international reputation as a country somehow resistant to progress. This perspective, which has been circulating in Guinean development dialogue for decades, renders the concept of progress in largely *material* terms. That is, progress in Guinea has historically been cast as rooted in the nation's apparent incapacity for economic growth. The poorest segments of the country's population have, despite substantial growth and improvements in the quality/accessibility of public sector programs such as education, been excluded

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from economic and other opportunities in Guinean society. This exclusion is partly the result of an overemphasis on structural approaches to development, these texts say. Yet the documents also point to the government's historical unwillingness and/or incapacity to change its approach to national development. Donor agencies cited in the documents that I examine in the present study have expressed frustration with the government's apparent reluctance to institute economic and democratic reforms, such as guaranteeing free and fair elections at all levels. These texts describe what they call the oppressive policies and practices of the Guinean leadership, past and present, as an unending problem in efforts towards development.

I have selected several texts as data sources for the present chapter, in order to provide contrasting perspectives on Guinean history. Whatever their differences in content and approach, all of the texts describe Guinea as a resource-rich country that has somehow not lived up to its potential. The implication is that Guinea should be much more than what it has become, in terms of its ability to provide for the continued economic prosperity of all its citizens. Although the development picture is in reality more complex, there has been in Guinea a pervasive sense of the country's own failure to become what everyone supposedly knows that it could be: a truly strong, vital and democratic society.

I have divided the present chapter into sections on Guinean topography and demographics, history, society and politics, and development. I start with statistical and geo-demographic data followed by a brief history, in which I

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discuss the social and political contexts of the present study. Finally, I describe Guinea's current state of development. Data sources include print and on-line documents as well as my own knowledge of Guinea from past work experiences in the country.

The nation's history since it declared independence in 1958 is in many respects a simple one to organize. There is the period under Touré's leadership; and the period after his death. Since then, Conté has maintained nearly complete control over the government.¹ Although the country's modern (i.e., since independence) history is what I am most concerned with here, I start with a synopsis of Guinea's pre-colonial and colonial history. Above all, historical texts highlight the circumstances in which Guinea became a nation as key to understanding the development of the modern Guinean state, one that has experienced isolation as a consequence of a strong sense of independence.

Topography and demographics

The Republic of Guinea is located in West Africa. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the countries of Guinea-Bissau and Senegal to the north, Mali to the northeast and Ivory Coast to the east. Sierra Leone and Liberia are situated along the country's southern border. The country is made up of four natural regions: Lower Guinea, Middle Guinea,² Upper Guinea and the Forest Region. About the size of the state of Oregon, Guinea's climate is generally hot and humid. Heavy rains fall throughout much of the country between late May

¹ The recent political strikes I mentioned earlier led to the naming of a new prime minister, which was negotiated between striking labor unions and Conté, to which the president has been forced to cede some of his authority over the state government.

² The texts I have read often use the terms, "Middle Guinea" and "Fuuta Jaloo" interchangeably (e.g., Nelson et al. 1975); I refer to this region of Guinea in the same way throughout the chapter.

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and early November; the rest of the year is dry, marked by harmattan winds out of the northeast. Flat and wet on its coastal plains, Guinea is hilly to mountainous throughout its central region (i.e., the Fuuta Jaloo) and the forest, and dry and flat to the north along its Senegalese and Malian borders. The headwaters of the Niger and Senegal rivers are all located in Middle Guinea. Despite its rather beautiful, lush and mountainous interior—featuring waterfalls and massive, verdant plateaus—Guinea has yet to attract any significant tourist trade. Political instability due to civil strife and incursions by rebel forces of Liberia and Sierra Leone to the south, combined with poor quality infrastructure, may be limiting the number of foreign nationals visiting the country.

Deforestation and erosion are a problem countrywide (CIA 2007), especially in the Fuuta Jaloo and the denser, more tropical climes of the southeast. Local populations throughout the country, and especially in these two zones, burn or cut trees and undergrowth in order to clear land for farming.³ Much of the land is rich and fertile, from the coastal plains through the Fuuta Jaloo and into the Forest Region, with about half of this is listed as farmland. The country's rich mineral resources include: aluminum bauxite, which is mined in Middle Guinea; iron ore; diamonds and gold, both found in Upper Guinea and the Forest Region; uranium; and salt from the coastal plains. Guinea boasts one of the world's richest bauxite deposits, making it one of the most important sources of the aluminum ore in the world.

³ Friends employed in various ministries responsible for agricultural development and forest/water management in Guinea's Fuuta Jaloo region often told me that they encouraged controlled burning of vegetation in some areas. This practice, they said, was designed to create a buffer zone by removing undergrowth during the dry season—which might otherwise burn uncontrollably, destroying valuable farm and grazing land, not to mention protected forest lands.

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The estimated total population of Guinea in 2007 is nearly ten million,⁴ and growing at about three percent per year. Almost half of the population is age 14 years or younger; the rest is between the ages of 15 and 64 years. The overall female-to-male ratio is nearly one-to-one. Average life expectancy is almost 50 years of age. There are an estimated 3.7 million people in the labor force, of which 76% work in agriculture;⁵ the balance of this force is employed in the industrial and service sectors. Agricultural products include rice, coffee, palm kernels, cassava, bananas, sweet potatoes, timber; there are also cattle, sheep and goats (CIA 2007).

There are three major ethnic groups in Guinea. The Peuhl (sic) live primarily in the Fuuta Jaloo region and make up 40% of the total population. At 30% of the population, the Malinké inhabit Upper Guinea; the Soussou, who inhabit the coastal plains and hills of Lower Guinea, comprise 20%; and the remaining 10% of the population is composed of other ethnic groups, who live mainly in the Forest Region. About 85% of the total population is Muslim, 8% Christian and the balance can be listed as holding indigenous beliefs.⁶ The country's official language, and medium of instruction, is French.⁷ The country

⁴ Current (CIA 2007) estimates place the number of refugees in Guinea at over 60,000 people from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast combined. Another 19,000 are listed as *internally displaced persons* (IDP).

⁵ Some 80% of total agricultural production in Guinea in 2004 was subsistence farming, according to the USAID (2005).

⁶ The term, *animism* has also been used to refer to indigenous spiritual beliefs. The word (from the Latin, *anima*, or 'soul') refers to the belief that inanimate objects possess spirits or souls independent of themselves.

⁷ President Touré had introduced indigenous language as the medium of instruction throughout Guinea; French was taught as a second language. With the re-establishment of formal relations with France in the early 1970s, French was brought back into the classroom as the medium of instruction.

As a Peace Corps teacher, I often heard education colleagues and friends working in other sectors criticize Touré's decision to privilege indigenous languages over French—which was still

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has eight national languages: Malinké, Susu, Fulani, Kissi, Basari, Loma, Koniagi, and Kpelle (CIA 2007).

A brief history

The present section examines Guinean history, society and politics as described by several texts, as well as some of my own personal accounts. Some of these accounts are from the year I spent doing the present study, but most are from the five-year period of 1995 to 2000 when I worked as a teacher and teacher training consultant. These collective written and oral accounts describe a nation whose desire for authentic independence from its colonial past has cast a pall over its perceived capacity to attain some kind of progress. Independence in the Guinean perspective used to mean total, autonomous self-government, when the nation was still in its infancy. However, what was once described as independence of spirit has since been portrayed as stubbornness, even incompetence, in the case of both Guinea's current and past presidents (Bah 2007). Instead of progressing the country's potential has remained, according to these accounts, seemingly and perpetually locked inside its vast natural and mineral resources—due in large part to the intransigence of its leadership. I will begin with a brief summary of pre-colonial Guinean history and society, followed by a description of life under the leadership of the nation's only two presidents: Sékou Touré and Lansana Conté.

used in public affairs in the country—because of the difficulties they had experienced in mastering the language. The prevailing attitude against local language had several effects. One was that children were discouraged, friends and colleagues would tell me, from speaking their mother tongue at school—to the point of being ridiculed, punished or both. People's dispositions against the use of local language at school made it difficult to convince teachers that mother tongue instruction was sometimes appropriate, especially for younger children. The national education project where I later worked encountered these difficulties when training teachers to use mother tongue to facilitate learning.

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Pre-colonial

The Malinké and the Peuls, who arrived in large numbers after the year 1000 A.D., were the first peoples to inhabit the region of Africa now called the Republic of Guinea. However, the origins of the Soussou, the third major ethnic group and that of the current President Lansana Conté, have not always been so clear (Nelson et al. 1975). Friends and colleagues in the country often spoke to me of the Dialonké, who were supposed to have been related to the first Soussou before the latter moved down from the Fuuta Jaloo⁸ into the coastal region. The coastal region is where most of the members of this ethnic group live today, which includes the capital city of Conakry. These three peoples constitute the three major ethnic groups of Guinea, around which much of the discussion of politics, society and development in the country has been centered during my years of living and working there.

Both the Peul and Malinké peoples played a significant part in West African history, attaining what is described as “a high degree of social development” (Nelson et al. 1975, p. 9). The Guinean people thus brought to their initial relationship with France a history of well-developed social structures and systems of governance. The French had eventually dominated both peoples by the late 1800s, however, through a combination of what is described as negotiation and military might⁹—in the rush among European powers to divide up

⁸ Another, possible spelling of “Dialonké” is “Jallonké,” meaning, literally, ‘inhabitants of the Jallon (i.e., mountains).’ This is how the Fuuta Jaloo region of Guinea, where I conducted the present study, got its name (The Joshua Project 1999).

⁹ Samory Touré, leader of the Malinké and its empire in Guinea, had originally struck a treaty with the French—without violence. However, the 1889 attack by so-called renegade French forces on the Toucouleur Empire of Guinea’s northern tier and an attempt to gain Malinké territory elsewhere led to the eventual clash between Touré and the French. Touré capitulated in 1898. As

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the continent among them.¹⁰ Guinea was one of many geographic sub-divisions arrived at by the French government in order to facilitate colonial administration within its territories. The first half of the twentieth century in Guinea was subsequently marked by French colonial administration via local indigenous leaders. Growing Guinean political power characterized the second half of the century, and eventual independence. Political parties first became a feature of Guinean social life after World War Two. In the waning days of the war, there was a felt need among the European powers to provide some autonomy to the indigenous peoples of their African territories. Guineans were thus allowed to form their own political groups, though these were always associated with established political parties of France. Like most European colonial powers, the French had sought to control indigenous peoples by keeping them divided, such as by selecting chiefs from different ethnic groups for local administrative roles. Initially, political parties were organized along ethnic lines. This situation remained virtually unchanged and unchallenged until the formation of the *Parti Démocratique de Guinée* (PDG), led by Sékou Touré. The PDG was the first political party to recruit widely from all ethnic groups, geographic zones and social strata. Touré and the PDG made a concerted effort to appeal especially to rural people, who up until that time had followed more or less the pattern of social life that I described earlier. "Complete social change [was] the avowed aim of

for the Peuls, civil war erupted in the wake of resentment over "continued payment of fees" (Nelson et al., p. 21) to the *almamy* of Timbo, the religious leader of the Peul people. This dispute led to French occupation followed by the cessation of Peul sovereignty over the Fuuta Jaloo.

¹⁰ According to Nelson et al. (1975), the French people did not always have a great deal of interest in colonial matters, and were instead occupied with domestic affairs. Consequently, the French government was not enthusiastic about moving beyond its West African base in Dakar, Senegal and further into the interior of the region. However, the French did want to expand trade, which led to the eventual occupation of what is now Guinea.

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Sékou Touré's government, and even before independence the party became the chosen instrument for remodeling Guinean society" (p. 85). The PDG served as a rallying point for growing opposition to French rule and the desire for autonomous self-government in the years leading up to independence.

Opposition to the French colonial government developed, somewhat paradoxically, via an association between Guinean political parties and the French Communists. Touré became secretary general of the PDG in 1952, recruiting members from labor unions of the "communist-dominated *General Confederation of Labor* (Confédération Générale du Travail—CGT), in which he held a prominent position." The strength of Touré and the PDG grew with the addition of new party members joining from the CGT, which had grown in numbers because of increased mining production and other industries. A territory-wide strike in September 1953, pushed by Touré, led to "a substantial increase in minimum wages, not only in Guinea but also in the rest of French West Africa. Sékou Touré's image, as well as the party's, was tremendously enhanced" (Nelson et al. 1975 p. 34). PDG membership more than quadrupled following these events. Touré was subsequently elected to the Territorial Assembly at the end of that same year; but he lost in a disputed election for a seat in the French National Assembly.

Passage of the *loi-cadre* [legal framework] by France in 1956 established universal suffrage in Guinea and other African colonies, and the "devolution of legislative powers to the individual territorial assemblies from the French National Assembly." Touré opposed this move, which he called "the balkanization of

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French Black Africa” (Nelson et al. 1975, p. 35). This act “was to become a major factor in the decision of Guinea’s leaders to vote against membership in the French Community two years later.”¹¹ However, passage of the *loi-cadre* did imply that the Territorial Assembly would eventually gain sovereignty as the instrument of the new Guinean government. The PDG continued to strengthen its position, striving to become “representative of all Guineans regardless of regional or ethnic origin” (p. 35, emphasis in the original). The PDG eventually gained two seats in the French National Assembly, in 1956, one of which was won by Sékou Touré. Guinea declared its independence in 1958, choosing complete autonomy rather than accept the offer of membership in the French Community with France and its other, former colonies. The French severed all relations with the new nation, refusing to recognize Guinea as an independent state (Berliner 2005).

Sékou Touré

The Republic of Guinea became the first African state in 1958 to set off into the uncharted territory of self-governance when it declared its independence from its former colonial ruler, France. The new state, in renouncing any ties to the French, established itself as both a source of African pride and some derision. Friends and colleagues from my years of teaching and other work in the country during the 1990s concurred, describing the country’s independence as an act of total liberation that, sadly, seemed to them to cost Guinea its once-bright future of progress. They told me that the nation had thus won the respect of people

¹¹ It is worth noting that Guinea may have withdrawn from France as much because of built-up resentment over the colonial power’s treatment of Guineans prior to independence versus desiring to make a bold statement by renouncing the tyranny of colonialism (Nelson et al. 1975). Whatever the true story, it is difficult to make this kind of an either-or distinction, since anti-colonialism likely fuels feelings of resentment and vice-versa (Berliner 2005).

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throughout Africa for its bold defiance on the one hand, and ridicule for the consequences of its stubborn foolishness on the other.

Guinea's history since it declared independence from the French in 1958 has been described as difficult to say the least. Having declined the offer to be allied with France, Guinea soon found itself without any support from the former colonial power. Arulpragasam and Sahn (1997) call this separation from France "traumatic." Except for the most essential personnel, the French left Guinea immediately after the country voted for complete independence. "Within 48 hours all French expatriates were withdrawn. With their administrative expertise also went equipment, medication, and even lightbulbs (sic)" (p. 10). Any remaining infrastructure was unusable. Touré subsequently consolidated power while turning inward, rejecting trade with France and other countries in favor of his own brand of African Socialism.¹² The young Guinean nation took a neutral though progressive stance toward the Cold War, seeking out aid and alliances from both Eastern and Western nations. However, the country found itself in a precarious economic situation in the wake of the French withdrawal of infrastructure, trade and aid (Berliner 2005; Nelson et al. 1975). Painting the French withdrawal as punishment for Guinea's challenge to colonialism, Touré's socialist orientation nonetheless brought more success in attracting aid and investment from Eastern bloc countries than Western ones. In fact, the Soviet Union can be credited with helping develop Guinea's aluminum bauxite mining capacity (Goerg 2005).

¹² Touré's political and economic orientation was part of a larger socialist movement across the African continent. This movement included, famously, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah—first presidents of Tanzania, Senegal and Ghana, respectively.

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Touré soon consolidated and centralized state authority under an increasingly dictatorial state (Nelson et al. 1975). Millions of Guineans fled the nation in light of worsening economic conditions and increasing political oppressions. Touré jailed or executed both Fulani and Malinké leaders, and others—anyone who he suspected might be capable of mounting serious opposition among these large and influential ethnic groups. (Touré himself was Malinké, from the Upper Guinea city of Faranah.) Thousands of people were jailed, tortured and murdered in the now-infamous Camp Boiro—a military facility located in the capital city of Conakry (Bah 2007; Doré 1986).¹³ Touré eventually outlawed all opposition parties and labor unions—any organization that might pose a threat to his regime. The economy was almost entirely stagnant by the late 1970s, due to mismanagement of wholly state-owned industry and the lack of foreign aid. Touré did initiate certain reforms later in the decade, in the face of popular demonstrations over poor economic and living conditions in the country. He then approached lenders abroad for support in developing a more open and market-oriented economy, in return for much-needed foreign assistance. Turmoil erupted in Guinea following Touré's death in a Cleveland, Ohio hospital, in April of 1984 (Berliner 2005).

Post-Touré

Lansana Conté, then a colonel in the Guinean Army, seized power following Touré's death, in what has been described as a bloodless coup (IRIN

¹³ The Camp Boiro International Memorial is a project created by Thierno S. Bah, former professor of linguistics at the University of Conakry and Fulbright-Hayes scholar. The Web-based project seeks to address issues of human rights by examining, through investigative research and writing, what the Web site describes as the atrocities committed by the Touré regime—and more human rights abuses of the current regime of Lansana Conté.

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2006a). Conté thus spoiled attempts by Touré's half brother (and prime minister) to gain control of the country (Berliner 2005). One of the new president's first acts was to release political prisoners, signaling perhaps the much-needed change that the Guinean people and donor agencies had been wanting. Yet Conté also suspended the constitution upon taking control of the government. Opposition soon rose.

There have been several attempts to overthrow the government since then, notably in 1985 and again in 1996. Conté survived both coup efforts, summarily trying (often in secret) and executing whomever he and his inner circle of advisors and confidants deemed to be complicit. His government and political party, the *Parti de l'Unité et du Progrès* (PUP) has been criticized worldwide for limiting the freedom of the Guinean press, public assembly, opposition parties, and for the generally poor state of the economy and public services. He won the country's first-ever presidential elections, held in 1993, by a narrow margin (Berliner 2005). Rebel incursions from Liberia and Sierra Leone¹⁴ occurred in the mid- to late-1990s, further complicating his presidency. A major conflict erupted along the southeastern border with Liberia when rebel forces from that country marched into Guinea in the year 2000, in an apparent attempt by former Liberian President Charles Taylor to destabilize the Guinean government (IRIN 2000a). The Guinean Army eventually defeated Taylor's forces and drove them from the country (OxResearch 2001).

¹⁴ Liberia was engaged in civil conflict from 1989 to 1997 and again from 2000 to 2003. Sierra Leone ended its 11-year long civil war in 2002.

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Conté's hold on power has tightened during the past two decades, to the point of jailing opposition candidate, Alpha Condé for two years following the 1998 presidential elections. This move was widely condemned by human rights groups (IRIN 2000b). Conté also pushed successfully in 2001 for the Guinean National Assembly to change the constitution and extend his term of office, in order to maintain power. He and the PUP have been accused of vote rigging in the more recent presidential and municipal elections of 2003, the latter of which were at one time somewhat independent and fair.¹⁵ However, neither Conté nor anyone in the political opposition has been able to resolve the state of poverty in the country (Berliner 2005, p. 94). Nationwide strikes over hyperinflation and what has been described as public frustration with government corruption and inaction in recent years forced the president to appoint a new prime minister in February 2007, in order to appease trade unions and return some stability to the country (Mahtani 2007). The European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other donors began suspending or canceling financial assistance to the country in 2002, citing government corruption and lack of progress towards political, social and economic reform (IRIN 2004).

Society and politics

The Peul theocracy of the Fouta Djallon was ruled by the *almamy*, the principal religious leader, who was able to use Islamic doctrine to maintain power

¹⁵ I recall from my teaching and other experiences in Guinea that opposition party candidates, who had been unsuccessful in challenging Conté's rule, were at one time successful in municipal elections. Candidates of the *Party of Renewal and Progress* (Parti du Renouveau et du Progrès-PRP), the *Union of for a New Republic* (Union pour la Nouvelle République-UNR) and the party into which the two later combined forces, the *Union for Progress and Renewal* (Union pour le Progrès et le Renouveau-UPR) all held mayoral seats in the country—generally within the Fouta Djallon region.

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and control while claiming to be divinely guided. In contrast, Samory Touré, Malinké leader of the Wassoulou Empire, ruled almost exclusively through his renowned military skill and negotiation with indigenous rulers of regional kingdoms and peoples. These included the Peuls of the Fuuta Jaloo region of Guinea (Nelson et al. 1975). These pre-colonial Guinean societies were to figure prominently in later political developments of the post-World War Two era, and in the post-colonial period. Both ethnic rivalry and autocracy have persisted in more recent Guinean society and politics: the president governs with what has been described as a stubborn tenacity bordering on totalitarianism. This same stubborn tenacity characterized the regime of Sékou Touré as well (Berliner 2005). However, politics have often been described as a remote part of Guinean daily life, which has traditionally been characterized by association with family and community.

Local social life

Guinean pre-colonial life has generally been described as rooted in close ties among people within village communities, from which residents derive social support (Nelson et al. 1975). Most Guineans traditionally lived in somewhat isolated communities of ten to 100 families (p. 79). Villages in pre-colonial Guinea have been described as patrilineal: each organized around the male descendants of the village founder. The locality where I conducted the ethnographic piece of the present study (which was really a collection of villages) exemplified this kind of rural life and structure. In an important sense, local residents often described themselves as *bhenguure gootun* [one family].

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Residents of each village within the Medina Primary School Community consulted and deferred to the eldest male of the local family line in matters of marriage, disputes over property boundaries, and so forth. All of the residents planted and tended subsistence crops such as corn, rice and vegetables; some also harvested potatoes and other cash crops. Community social events—funerals, marriages, baptisms, and religious holiday celebrations—dominated life for local inhabitants. People gathered together to build homes for their neighbors, repaired each other's roofs, and planted crops in the same fields. Politics was part of their world, as they described it. Yet local politics, which was often bound up in family lineage and local tradition, dominated village life throughout the school community.

National Politics

Touré was a president who firmly avowed his commitment to African unity, state autonomy and a larger role for the country in international affairs. (He argued publicly for an African seat on the UN Security Council.) Following the French departure, Sékou Touré was left with a free and independent nation to lead, which was on the verge of economic collapse. Guinea not only lost its favored trading status with France, among other things; it also lost some \$75 million in French development aid (Berliner 2005). Despite these challenges (or perhaps because of them) Touré enjoyed widespread support among the population and even within rival political groups in the early years of his presidency (Nelson et al. 1975). As a one party state, the young Guinean Government and the PDG (which were essentially one and the same) focused on

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African Socialism, becoming a test case for the independent post-colonial African state. The euphoria was not to last, however. The failure of Touré's government to transform the country socially and economically, as he claimed to be doing, led him to become increasingly intransigent and militant. He eventually began manufacturing every manner of plot against his regime¹⁶ in order to justify his increasingly oppressive methods of social control and to maintain power (Berliner 2005; Doré 1986).

Since assuming the presidency in 1984, Lansana Conté has proven to be a stubborn leader in the same spirit as Sékou Touré. He and his government have had a difficult relationship with the World Bank, the IMF and other donor and lending agencies over Guinea's apparent failure to institute policy reforms and improve the quality of public services. Following a failed coup attempt in February of 1996, Conté jailed a number of officials in the government and the armed forces on charges of treason. A period of mistrust ensued, during which Conté made frequent changes in ministry leadership; government responsiveness to donors had become increasingly inconsistent. Since 2000 the president's failing health and charges of government corruption—Conté has become known for his fierce loyalty to business and military leaders, and others who has been loyal to him, to the point of allowing them to operate unfettered, regardless of the circumstances—have increased public and international pressure for him to step down. Labor unions across the country have organized national strikes in an effort to get the president to quit. Conté declared marshal

¹⁶ According to Goerg (2005), it was hard to differentiate the real threats to Touré's regime from those he had concocted to justify arresting, jailing, and executing his political rivals.

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law in January 2007 in order to quell increasingly violent protests. These protests have been blamed on worsening economic conditions and the military's heavy-handed approach to suppressing public demonstrations (IRIN 2007a). Continued political and economic instability have, according to donor agency documents, hampered the country's progress towards the realization of development goals of poverty reduction, improved fiscal management, and the revitalization of the nation's economy (UNDP 2005). But perhaps most disconcerting for donors, some government officials, and Guinean citizens alike is what has been described as the nation's great potential for social and economic development in the face of prevailing underdevelopment.

Development

Texts on Guinean development written throughout Guinea's history often describe the country as rich in natural and mineral resources, poor and underdeveloped, and hence not living up to its promise. "Long regarded as the most favorably endowed of the French-speaking countries of West Africa in agricultural, mineral, and hydroelectric potential, Guinea nonetheless found itself fourteen years after independence on the United Nations (UN) list of the world's twenty-five least developed countries" (Nelson et al. 1975, p. 197). A text twenty years ago describes Guinea as a nation of abundance, "a country not lacking in substantial natural assets"¹⁶ (Doré 1986, p. 17), but which nonetheless has failed to reap any comparable benefits. This perception of a country that has not lived up to its own great promise continues to the present. "Guinea possesses major mineral, hydropower, and agricultural resources, yet remains an

¹⁶ I translated this passage from the original French language text.

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underdeveloped nation” (CIA 2007, p. 1). More than any other aspect of Guinea’s history, this perspective of a society possessing all it needs to succeed yet interminably bound for failure has permeated the national dialogue on progress/development. This rather unflattering, dismal portrait of Guinea has been exacerbated by its pervasive reputation as a country that literally cut itself off from much needed resources when it boldly declared its complete autonomy in 1958.

Development under Touré

“Guinea’s de-linking from a major trade partner reinforced the economic inward orientation opted for in Touré’s version of African Socialism. Equally significant, the severance from France completed the PDG’s consolidation of political power” (Arulpragasam & Sahn 1997, p. 10). Sékou Touré introduced indigenous language as the medium of instruction in schooling, reforms in the agricultural sector and sought assistance far and wide for his economic development program. Because of the country’s socialist orientation, however, collaboration with Western nations was difficult. Touré therefore sought trade partnerships and aid from the Soviet Union and China (Berliner 2005).

Throughout his tenure as president, Touré spoke often of the need for Guineans, and Africans in general, to unify and strengthen themselves through the development of their own resources. However, his efforts to build a cohesive and productive nation have been widely dubbed a failure: more rhetoric than results (Berliner 2005; Doré 1986). By the time of his death, the country had severe economic problems stemming from Touré’s radical ideology (Goerg

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2005). As a test case of the wholly independent, African socialist nation, Guinea appeared to have fallen short. The country has yet to realize its tremendous potential to develop into a free, prosperous and strong society of the kind that Touré was said to have envisioned.

Development under Conté

Guinean has, under President Lansana Conté, experienced some social and economic progress. The government introduced a comprehensive structural adjustment program in 1989, with financial assistance from the World Bank, the IMF and bi-lateral aid agencies, including USAID. World Bank and IMF loans were to provide direct budgetary support with incentives to encourage the Guinean government to reform its fiscal management structures and policies. The country was to increase spending in public sectors such as education and healthcare, revamp its money and trade policy to allow for freer import/export of goods and provide conditions for free and fair elections at all levels of governance.

The UNDP and the World Bank both deemed the ten-year structural adjustment plan to be a success in many respects. The country enjoyed economic growth of over 4% annually from 1995-1999. During the ten-year period from 1989 to 1999, gross school enrollment increased by 20%; and infant mortality rates also decreased during this same period. Yet poverty has been a continuing problem, according to recent policy documents (UNDP 2002a; 2005). Led by the European Union and the World Bank, donors have expressed

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increasing concern over persistent government corruption and political instability (IRIN 2006b).

The Guinean government offered a new vision of development, with technical assistance from the *United Nations Development Program* (UNDP), in order to address the continued state of poverty and underdevelopment in the country. The government formulated between 1996 and 1998 a new concept of national development, put forth in a document entitled, "Guinea, Vision 2010." The concept, which is consistent with the human-centered development approach is based on "principles of justice, accountability, solidarity, and participation. Its ultimate objective was to improve the living conditions of the population" (UNDP 2002a, p. 9). This resulted in a consultative process to devise a poverty reduction strategy for the country, guided by. Begun in 2000, this policy and strategy formulation process ended in 2005 with the adoption of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. According to UNDP documents, the country has, by relaxing currency supports in 2004, made some necessary changes to fiscal management strategy. However, widespread inflation during the past three years has severely exacerbated conditions of poverty and further hampered the country's progress (IRIN 2007b). Further, the state government under Conté has developed a reputation as opportunistic and unresponsive. Time and time again, the country has accepted the terms set by the World Bank and the IMF for loans, debt relief and other forms of assistance only to fail to meet the agreed upon conditions (e.g., IRIN 2006b). Financial assistance to the

country from these aid partners has essentially been cut off since 2003 (CIA 2007).

Summary and conclusion

Guinea is a country that has been marked by autocratic rule throughout its history. The nation has been characterized as having a wealth of resources, but poor infrastructure; as political unstable, at home and along its borders; as underdeveloped; and as poor—one of the poorest countries in the world. During data collection, there was a tendency for these contexts to pervade everyday conversation, activity and documents, to the point where achieving any development objectives seemed to be an insurmountable task. To anyone working in international development today, anywhere, this is a common perception: we are not making any progress. Yet in Guinea the prospects for a positive development outcome have been cast as so historically problematic, so endlessly perplexing, that the possibility of progress has become nearly unimaginable. Juxtaposed against this image of the impossible, failed nation-state is one of a Guinean nation blessed with all the resources it could ever want.

According to the CIA Factsheet on Guinea (2007), the natural abundance of resources in Guinea should make the country one of the most promising on the African continent:

The mineral wealth of Guinea makes the economy potentially one of the strongest in Africa. More than one-third of the known world reserves of high-grade bauxite ore are (sic) found in Guinea. Sizable deposits of iron ore exist; other mineral resources include diamonds, gold, petroleum, uranium, copper, and manganese. Guinea also has great potential for hydroelectric power (CIA 2007).

This passage portrays Guinea as a rich nation, one that should have no worries about its future. The country needs only to exploit these resources in order to reap the benefits of development. There has been little progress, however, say recent documents, due to problems of governance, a faltering economy, and political strife within the country:

Guinea has maintained its internal stability despite spillover effects from conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia. As those countries have rebuilt, Guinea's own vulnerability to political and economic crisis has increased. In 2006, declining economic conditions and popular dissatisfaction with corruption and bad governance prompted two massive strikes that sparked urban unrest in many Guinean cities (CIA 2007, p. 1).

Guinea is here portrayed as a nation that has the material resources necessary to developing a strong economy and society on the one hand, and yet a country that has failed to address issues important to the kind of recovery exemplified by neighboring states. As these passages point out, there is apparently no reason, besides a lack of willingness for change, why Guinea has not yet succeeded in its pursuit of progress. A similar sense of the promise and elusiveness of progress has been felt in the local dialogue of Mafou Quartier as well, as I discuss in the following two chapters. In the following chapter, I first examine how progress in Guinea and the rest of the developing world has been characterized in national/international dialogue. In this perspective, national-level policy documents describe the inclusion of ordinary Guineans in the development process as key to future development.

Chapter Three: Participation and the Measurement of Progress

Introduction

According to recent documents on national development, social and economic progress in Guinea has been elusive. Despite some economic growth and other successes, the documents say, many Guineans remain poor after two decades of development effort. These documents claim that citizen (i.e., popular) participation is thus needed to ensure the equitable and efficient distribution of the benefits of development—such as a living wage, access to good schools and adequate health care—to its beneficiaries. The documents say that poverty and other indicators are proof not only that development has *failed* to reach its intended beneficiaries; they have also been excluded from involvement in their ‘own’ development. These documents give special emphasis to the participation of what they describe as “the poorest and most vulnerable population groups” (e.g., UNDP 2002a, p. 11) in what has come to be called “the development process” (p. 20). These documents say that a successful poverty reduction strategy, or one in which *all* Guineans benefit from development, means involving all segments of the country’s population in this process.

In the present chapter, I examine policy and other documents from Guinea’s recent past that cast *participation* as necessary to *progress*. These documents portray the development model of the 1980s as too heavily focused on national economic performance while ordinary people have been excluded, marginalized and impoverished. The documents call for what they portray as a

more participatory approach to development, especially of so-called poor and marginalized groups. According to the documents, such an approach is needed in order to make development more 'human-centered' and effective than it has been in the past. This would-be shift in the focus of development has taken place amid changes in the *profile of poverty indicators* that have historically dominated worldwide discourse on progress.

The concept of participation has many roots. It is rooted in the idea that people know the conditions in which they live better than anyone else; in the notion that schools and other public institutions (i.e., 'government') must be held accountable for meeting people's needs; in the idea of the human right to things like education, good health, and the means to earn a decent living wage; and in the idea of citizen ownership over government and the development process. According to the literature, underlying the increasing worldwide focus on participation are expressed concerns over 'empowerment' among aid organizations (e.g., Bebbington et al. 2007) and the perception that beneficiaries have historically lacked control over development interventions (Cooke & Kothari 2001). Research elsewhere says that the increasing popularity of participation may have more to do with its inherent appeal than the actual effectiveness of the approach (Cleaver 1999). My aim in the present chapter is to examine these and other shades of meaning in what recent documents call 'participatory development' in Guinea, as a case in the wider international discourse on progress. These documents thus portray participatory development as more

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democratic and effective than the so-called 'non-participatory' approaches of Guinea's past.

The concept of participation has been cast within international discourse on development as *essential* to progress. In this perspective, participation is portrayed as a necessary, appropriate, useful and just approach to Guinean development. These same meanings are present within the worldwide trend toward the use of so-called 'new' ways of measuring development. The apparent shift within this discourse, from the idea of development as 'non-participatory' to development as 'participatory', has taken place in the wake of emerging new approaches to poverty assessment in Guinea and other countries. According to Kothari (2001), these so-called participatory approaches to development are rooted in the primacy of locally-produced, or 'grassroots', knowledge—a recurrent theme in international discourse. The data that I gathered in the Medina Primary School community and the archival data that I examine in the present chapter show that the concept of participation is closely linked to that of progress at the local and national/international level—albeit in different ways.

Data collection and analysis

The principal documents that I examine in the present chapter come from a recent series of documents on comprehensive development in Guinea called *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – Republic of Guinea*, or PRSPs. I first highlighted these documents, which were published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in Chapter One. The documents came out in 2000, 2002 and 2004; however, I draw most frequently on the 2002 PRSP.

Virtually all of the other documents that I have examined refer to this latter document as the *poverty reduction strategy* (PRS) adopted by the Guinean government.¹ I also examine documents of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)² and other organizations that speak to development, poverty reduction and participation in Guinea and other countries.³

Collectively, the documents that I examine here characterize three key areas of what they describe as “grassroots” (Aycrigg 1998, p. 13) or “citizen” (p. 24) participation in development: poverty assessment, policy formulation and program evaluation. For example, one UNDP report on gender and poverty emphasizes the importance of people’s involvement in poverty assessment, an approach that the document says draws upon “the poor’s *own* criteria of poverty as well as their *own* solutions” (Chambers, in Cagatay 1998, p. 6, emphasis added). This and other recently published documents are examples of how

¹ I located documents on the Guinean poverty reduction strategy framework, produced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IDA & IMF 2006) and the Guinean government (e.g., MEF 2006a). However, unlike the UNDP series of PRSPs, which outline the strategy itself, these other documents describe themselves as evaluation or ‘progress’ reports (e.g., MEF 2006b).

² It is unclear exactly why the UNDP, and not the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), published the principal series of PRSPs for Guinea. After all, a synthesis report published by the Bank and the IMF says that the two organizations developed and introduced the *poverty reduction strategy* framework in “low-income countries [worldwide]...as a precondition for access to debt relief and concessional (sic) financing” (World Bank & IMF 2005, p. 1). However, the PRSP/Guinea documents do cite past and present programs of both the World Bank and the UNDP as contributing toward the same kind of human-centered and participatory poverty reduction strategy in the country.

³ Examples include PRSPs on comprehensive development in Bangladesh (IMF 2003a), Georgia (IMF 2003b), Honduras (IMF & IDA 2001), Vietnam (IMF 2004), and Senegal (UNDP 2002b), in which poverty and poverty reduction have become increasingly central to international discourse on progress. As with the PRSPs on Guinean development that I examine in the present study, these other PRSP documents describe ‘democratic’ participation as an integral part of the development process. For instance, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Georgia* (IMF 2003b) says, “The preparation of the document was conducted within the spirit of democratic participation” (p. 3). Likewise, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Vietnam* (IMF 2003a) describes the need to “enhance grassroots democracy and provide...support to the poor” by creating “conditions for people to fully participate in the development process and to have equal opportunities” (p. 43).

international discourse has come to focus increasingly on participation, as necessary to what has come to be called *human development* (e.g., UNDP 1990).

Although the PRSP/Guinea documents of the UNDP cannot be said to represent all that has been written recently about development in the country, they can serve as primary sources of data on participation in comprehensive national development. I say this because documents of the World Bank and other, major multilateral and bilateral aid organizations describe participation in similar fashion. These documents also refer to the same, core development programs, such as the Country Assistance Strategy of the World Bank and the Human Development Initiative (HDI) of the UNDP. For example, the World Bank document, *Participation and the World Bank: Success, Constraints and Responses* (Aycrigg 1998) addresses grassroots participation in the process for drafting development programs and identifying development needs. According to the document, "Participation in the CAS [Guinea] led to the identification of governance (justice and security, reconciliation and tolerance, democracy, transparency, decentralization and gender equality) as one of the five priority development issues." More generally, the document says, "Staff [of the World Bank] also felt that participatory CASs were a method of bringing those who had traditionally been marginalized into the development process" (p. 11-12). I cite this document to show that participatory development in Guinea was not the concern of the UNDP alone among the major transnational aid agencies.

I am using documents published by the UNDP as primary sources of data in the present chapter for two reasons. First, these documents describe the most recent Guinean comprehensive development plan in greater detail and breadth than any other documents that I found. Second, and most importantly for my purposes, the documents tell how it is that participation has become so prominent within the wider discourse on Guinean progress—as *necessary* to poverty reduction. This same perspective is present in other UNDP documents worldwide, which I have also selected for examination. I selected a third set of documents published by the Guinean government, which complement these two sets of documents. In the present section, I list the documents that I selected to examine in this chapter and describe how I selected them, beginning with the first set of UNDP documents. My objective has been to select documents that show how we have come to talk about, describe, portray or convey the idea of participation in development within Guinea and other national/international contexts.

As I said earlier in the chapter, the documents that I examine here describe participation as part of a significant change in approach to Guinean comprehensive development from the previous development plan of the mid-1980s. In addition to the more recent documents that I gathered, I sought out documents on the original comprehensive development plan described within the selected UNDP/PRSP documents. These UNDP documents describe how progress is measured and how successful development is supposed to take

place, revealing the *rationale* of participation as it has been portrayed within the broader discourse.⁴

Although the meanings of concepts such as development, poverty and participation vary by document and context, my examination shows that participation has taken on increasing importance within international discourse on progress worldwide. However, whether or not this new-found importance of participation has any connection to development outcomes is difficult to say. Regardless, I want to make clear before continuing that I am not trying to demonstrate any such connection. That is, I am not attempting to show that development has/has not, in reality, actually *become* more participatory, effective, democratic, equitable or anything else—in Guinea or elsewhere. Rather, I am limiting my argument to the *meanings* given to the concept of participatory development within these documents. My aim, then, is to understand what these discourses say that participation is *supposed* to be or do, establish or signify. I am making the distinction here between seeking out what development discourse *holds* to be true or accurate about participatory development versus what actually *is* (or even *should* be) true about development (i.e., what does/does not work; what is/is not participatory, equitable and so on).

As I outlined in Chapter One, the theoretical approach that I use in the present study draws upon the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his concept of the limits of possibility (Foucault 1981) in how people describe their own

⁴ Whereas the bulk of the documents I examine in this study were published after 1984, when current-president Lansana Conté took power, I do not assume that national development only 'began' during this period. I will take up the history of development in the country in more detail in the second chapter.

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participation in progress. That is, the possible or available ways of participating in education and development are bound up within *discourse*—as consisting in both dialogue and activity (Mills 2000). However, whether or not descriptions of practice fit with the reality of actual practice (and vice-versa) has, again, not been my primary concern in this study. Rather, I have been occupied with studying how documents have come to portray participation, especially its underlying rationale. I will then compare local meanings of participation and progress with those that I encountered within the documents examined in the present chapter.

Poverty and progress

A close reading of the PRSPs and other recent documents on development in Guinea and other countries reveals two ideas that have been emerging within international discourse during the past two to three decades. One idea says that women and other segments of the nation's population are poor and marginalized within society largely because they have been *excluded* from participating in development. Low income levels, high illiteracy rates, limited access to health care and other factors are described within these documents as *indicators* of such poverty, marginalization and therefore of people's exclusion from the development process. Another idea to emerge says that Guinea and other countries will not realize progress unless ordinary people, particularly the poor and marginalized, *participate* in their 'own' development. This idea holds that participation in three areas—poverty assessment, policy formulation/implementation, and the monitoring/evaluation of development

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Development worldwide has been increasingly characterized as a problem of reducing *poverty*. According to the United Nations (UN) website, the *Millennium Project* (UN 2007):

More than one billion people—one-sixth of the world's population—still live in extreme poverty, lacking the safe water, proper nutrition, basic health care and social services needed to survive. This means a single episode of disease, an ill-timed pregnancy, a drought or a crop-destroying pest can be the difference between life and death. In many of the poorest countries, life expectancy is half of that in the high-income world—40 years instead of 80 years (p.1).

Given these circumstances, the website says, World leaders thus committed in the year 2000 “to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty” by 2015. The site lists “Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger” (p. 1) as the first of these seven goals that the project says it has established. Progress, then, has increasingly become a matter of reducing poverty, according to how development is described within recent policy documents and aid agency reports.

In the Republic of Guinea, the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (PRSP) (UNDP 2002a) describes what it calls a new approach to comprehensive national development. The document begins by describing and comparing two national initiatives: the *structural adjustment program*⁵ launched in 1985; and the current effort, entitled, *Guinea, Vision 2010*, which was conceived between 1996 and 1998. According to the PRSP, growth-oriented models of development have

⁵ The World Bank and the IMF offered loans and other forms of budgetary support as incentives towards improved fiscal management policy and strategy. These institutions proposed such monetary assistance to national governments, which was tied to certain performance indicators—including increased expenditure in education and other public sector services in Guinea and other developing countries (Moulton et al. 2002).

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failed to address the needs of their intended beneficiaries because they have left ordinary Guineans out of the development process. The PRSP says that this pattern of exclusion has been especially pronounced among groups such as women, children and the rural poor, which the document describes as among the most marginalized segments of the population.⁶ The PRSP thus casts the *Vision 2010* initiative as an improvement over past efforts, largely because it supposedly *empowers* people in a way that *equalizes* the assumed relationship between people and their (state) government. One of the chief instruments of empowerment, according to how the PRSP portrays it, is *participation*. I examine this and other documents in the present section, which show how progress has—during the past two decades—come to be portrayed as a matter of reducing poverty. At about the same time, new conceptions of development and poverty have been taking shape within this discourse, in which participation has become increasingly visible as a legitimate approach to measuring and reducing poverty.

⁶ This kind of criticism had already arisen in global development discourse of by the mid-1990s, largely over what Long (2001) describes as the perceived failure of structural adjustment programs of the 1980s to adequately address the needs of all segments of the world's populations. These perceived shortcomings, says the author, led multilateral and bilateral donor agencies such as the World Bank, the UNDP, the USAID and the French Cooperation to seek out alternatives to macroeconomic development models of the past. At the same time, I argue that international discourse has increasingly been describing poverty as a problem of state failure. On-line documents, for example, consistently describe developing country governments as corrupt, ineffective, inefficient, disinterested, and otherwise lacking the capacity/willingness to deliver adequate public services to their citizens (e.g., UNDP 2003b; USAID 2003). There has thus been an increasing emphasis in development discourse on "good governance" via civil society involvement in the public sector, as a means of improving government accountability in the delivery of education (e.g., ADB 1999, p. 18) and other services. Due to limitations of space and the primary focus of the present study on participation and progress, I have not examined the idea of failure and development more broadly—but do see the need to mention it here, as one of several threads of discussion that have appeared in global discourse.

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The persistence and reduction of poverty

According to recent documents published by the UNDP, the World Bank and the Guinean government, past development efforts in Guinea have not fully addressed issues of poverty (e.g., UNDP 2000). As evidence of this failure, the documents offer what they describe as the uneven distribution of development's benefits—such as income, educational access and improved health. For example, the report of a national poverty survey completed by the Guinean government and the World Bank in the mid-1990s says that a large proportion of the population remains poor (MPCI 1997). Consultations with people living in poverty, the PRSP/Guinea says, indicate that they see poverty in a variety of ways, including: poor access and quality of public services; poor infrastructure; and the historically low level of people's involvement in development and governance (UNDP 2002a). New indicators of poverty have thus been emerging, which these documents claim are more representative of how people truly experience poverty—as well as how development models of the past have been lacking. The documents that I examine here are therefore examples of how the concepts of *poverty* and *development* have become more and more closely linked to one another within the broader discourse on progress. These documents say that continued poverty is evidence not only of the failure of past development efforts to benefit all of Guinea's people; but also of the need to organize future initiatives around poverty reduction. I begin with a close examination of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP): Republic of Guinea*.

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The PRSP (UNDP 2002a) describes how, after President Lansana Conté took power in 1984, Guinea needed “to improve the overall framework for its economic development.” According to the document, in 1985 the government decided to institute the *Economic and Financial Reform Program* (PREF). The PRSP describes this comprehensive reform program as one of Guinea’s early attempts to reduce poverty under its new national leadership. The document says, however, that PREF was part success, part failure. The program’s objective was, according to the PRSP, to promote “rational development of the country’s potential by reducing macroeconomic imbalances within the context of a liberalized economic system” (UNDP 2002a, p. 9). The PRSP says that the resulting “stabilization package,” as the document calls it, brought inflation under better control and led to improved fiscal management, among other benefits. The document also cites economic growth under the program of over 4 percent per year from 1995 to 1999, which it says outstripped annual population growth for the same period. Gross school enrollment had improved as well, the document adds—from 29 to over 53 percent between 1989 and 1999. The PRSP says further that infant mortality rates had fallen, and that more people had access to potable water. In other words, the PRSP says that gains had been made under PREF in virtually every sector—and especially in the area of what the document calls “basic services” (p. 11) of health care and education. However, the PRSP says, “Despite...gains in social areas,” the PRSP says, “Guinea remains ranked toward the bottom of countries in the *Human Development Index* (HDI), published the UNDP” (UNDP 2002a, p. 9). Most troubling, according to the

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PRSP, is what it describes as the *unequal* distribution of wealth and poverty in the country. “Poverty in Guinea is...unevenly spread among the various socioeconomic groups and the various regions of the country” (p. 10), the document says. By way of supporting this assertion, the PRSP cites data on Guinea’s state of development, which the document says have been gathered since the launching of PREF.

According to the *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (UNDP 2000)—an initial draft of the final PRSP adopted in 2002—Guinea’s poor economic performance and conditions of poverty there led the government to formulate, between 1996 and 1998, a new national development plan. The plan was announced in a proclamation entitled, *Guinea, Vision 2010*.⁷ The Interim PRSP adds that the Vision 2010 plan’s “ultimate objective was to improve the living conditions of the population” (p. 7). The interim strategy paper followed in 2000, it says, initiating the poverty reduction strategy paper formulation process.⁸ According to how the document portrays the aim of the Vision 2010 plan, poverty was far more complex than it was once thought to be. This increased complexity, the document says, explains what it describes as the causes and manifestations of poverty.

⁷ I have been unable to obtain the original document announcing the Guinea, Vision 2010 plan. The PRSP (UNDP 2002a) describes the plan as the precursor to the World Bank’s *Country Assistance Strategy* (CAS) and the UNDP’s *Human Development Initiative* (HDI) for the country. The PRSP and other documents describe the plan as a broad letter of intent issued by the Guinean government concerning its future development objectives. I instead examine documents that refer to the plan, and that describe how subsequent development programs are addressing plan objectives.

⁸ World Bank (e.g., IDA & IMF 2006), UNDP (e.g., MP & UNDP 2005) and Guinean government documents (e.g., MEF 2006a) all say that the interim document was revised and then adopted in 2002, two years after the Interim PRSP.

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The PRSP cites, among other documents, *Un profil de pauvreté* (MPCI 1997)—as what the former describes as evidence of the persistence of poverty, and the failings of the previous development model. The latter document is a self-described poverty profile that was completed, it says, by the Guinean government via a nationwide survey. All of this took place with the collaboration of the World Bank in 1994/95. According to the profile, “about 40 % of the population finds itself in a situation of absolute poverty—that is, living at an income level below the poverty line” (p. iv).⁹ At about the same time, the PRSP says, the UNDP and the World Bank launched two development initiatives in Guinea, called the Human Development Initiative (IDH) and Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), respectively. According to the PRSP, the overarching objective of what it calls these two “past efforts to reduce poverty” was “to make people the core focus of development policy.” The document adds, “One of the most original features of these initiatives has been the participatory process used to formulate and validate them” (UNDP 2002a, p. 33). The PRSP says that the IDH was introduced in 1995; the CAS in 1997. According to the document, “The challenge [of the IDH] was to place human beings at the center of the development process, by considering improvement in prosperity and the quality of life as the ultimate aims of this new approach” (UNDP 2002a, p. 52). According to the document, the CAS was, like the IDH, implemented as “a strategic approach to

⁹ The document indicates that it is a product of the *Projet d'Appui au Développement Socio-économique* (PADSE), which it says was jointly funded by the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank and the Guinean government. As part of the PADSE project, the poverty profile was created using data from the *Enquête Intégrale* (EI)—one of three poverty surveys conducted in Guinea during the mid-1990s. I translated all excerpts cited from these and other French-language documents myself.

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poverty alleviation based on grassroots ownership of the [development] process” (p. 53). According to the PRSP, then, the participatory approach to development has its origins in what I will call these ‘interim’ development programs—namely, the CAS and the IDH.

Letting the poor re-define poverty

The *Interim PRSP* describes the formulation of the poverty reduction strategy as a participatory, *consultative* process. This idea of consulting ordinary people in the conceptualization of development policy appears in this and other documents in conjunction with a broad description of poverty, which the document says is connected to all sectors of human life and progress. The following excerpt from the Interim PRSP is an example of how the meaning of poverty has been shifting within the discourse on Guinean development, and how documents cast poverty and participation as closely connected to one another:

The concept of poverty encompasses vast life issues; some are quantitative in nature (income levels, for example), while others are essentially qualitative (access to basic services).

Consultations held early this fiscal year revealed that the people perceive poverty in terms of lack of jobs and low income levels, limited access to basic social services (education, health, etc.), poor quality of public services, exclusion of the handicapped, inadequate basic infrastructure, scant *participation* in decision making, etc. (UNDP 2000, p. 8, emphasis added).

The Interim PRSP thus describes poverty as a concept that is perceived by ordinary Guineans in many forms, such as lack of access to what the document calls “basic social services.” This excerpt thus depicts poverty as a matter of income, jobs, access to public services, even people’s “scant participation in decision-making.” The document adds that past development efforts have not,

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however, addressed these and other complexities of poverty. "Poverty [in Guinea] remains severe," the document says, "and the responses attempted thus far have failed to take account of all aspects of the problem" (UNDP 2000, p. 57).

According to the PRSP (2002a), "Poverty in Guinea is a *multidimensional* phenomenon unevenly spread among the various socioeconomic groups and the various regions of the country" (p. 11, emphasis added). It was through the process of asking women and members of other, so-called 'marginalized' groups about poverty, the document says, that the concept became clear as varied and complex. This and other excerpts of the documents that I examine here thus portray poverty as about more than just a person's income. Rather, these documents portray poverty and poverty reduction as a matter of having choices available and accessible to them. According to the a report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 1990):

people often value achievements that do not show up...in higher measured income or growth figures: better nutrition and health services, greater access to knowledge, more secure livelihoods, better working conditions, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, and a sense of *participating* in the economic, cultural and political activities of their communities (p. 9, emphasis added).

The HDR 1991 (UNDP 1991) echoes this same perspective, adding, "The real objective of development is to increase people's...choices" (p. 9). The report says that, while income figures into such choices, it is not everything. Things like health, education, environment and human freedoms, the report adds, are also important to people throughout the world.

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As I have shown through the previously cited excerpts, a new concept of **poverty** has been emerging within the discourse on progress in Guinea and other **countries**. According to these excerpts, poverty is a major obstacle to **development** that manifests itself in a variety of ways—which are not limited to **income** levels. According to a United Nations website, a large proportion of the **world's** populations live in what it describes as “grinding poverty, hunger and **disease**.” The website says that what it calls civil unrest, “state failures” (UN 2007, p. 1) and insecurity in general can all be traced to poverty. The primary **goal** of global development, then, according to the UN website and other **documents** examined here, must be the reduction of poverty.

The print and web-based documents that I examine in the present chapter **cast** poverty as present within all sectors of development—health, education, **economy**, environment and so on. This feature of the discourse on Guinean **development** are apparent in some of the excerpts that I have cited in the present **section**. Further, these excerpts portray people's *exclusion* from participation in **their own** social, economic and political life as a major determining *factor* of **poverty**; and popular participation as a rationale approach to (future) successful **development**. These findings may not, in and of themselves, appear to be **significant**. However, the findings presented here do show in detail exactly what **meanings** have become associated with the concept of participation. **Participation**—or rather, the lack of it—as described in the documents that I **examine** here, is first cited as a way of explicating the continued marginalization **of** certain groups of people. Second, participation is offered by these documents

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as a way forward—as inclusive and empowering, the documents say, in ways that development has not been in the past.

According to the documents I examine in the present section, poverty can mean lack of access to employment opportunities, public services, and decision-making processes in family and community. The documents say that these and other kinds of poverty are felt more acutely by (or pose greater potential danger to) women versus men, rural versus urban people, illiterate versus literate ones, and so on. These categories of people have therefore been marginalized in the development process, according to these documents. Participation came into its own in Guinea during this expansion of categories of *human poverty*: the possible ways in which one can be described as *poor*.

Measuring development

Human development is moving to centre (sic) stage in the 1990s. For too long, the question has been: how much is a nation producing? Now the question must be: how are its people faring (UNDP 1991, p. 13).

Participation had, from the mid-1990s onward, become an increasingly prominent focus of the wider discourse on Guinean progress. At about the same time, according to how the excerpts from the PRSP that I have cited thus far describe things, a new and broader conception of poverty began to emerge. Poverty is not, the PRSP and other documents examined here say, merely a question of low income levels. Rather, it is, according to these documents, about things like “a lack of human dignity and autonomy” (Cagatay 1998, p. 5) and “limited access to basic social services....inadequate basic infrastructure, scant participation in decision making (UNDP 2000, p. 8). As progress was increasingly

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portrayed as a matter of reducing poverty, this so-called ‘new’ approach to conceiving of, defining and *measuring* poverty was also becoming a dominant feature of the discourse on Guinean development.

The document cited at the beginning of the present section portrays what it calls “*human* development” as focusing not on national production, but rather on how well people are “faring.” This particular excerpt shows how recent documents on development worldwide have come to portray development: as having meant or been one thing in the past; and meaning something else today. Specifically, the report says that what it calls the “question” of development has for “too long” been the level of national production. The HDR cited above says, however, that development “now” needs to address the welfare or “well-being” (UNDP 1991, p. 3) of ordinary people worldwide. The report describes development as something that ought to be determined, organized, implemented and so forth according to how its primary beneficiaries in a given nation (i.e., “its people”) are actually *doing*—economically, socially and otherwise. This perspective signaled the emergence of a new profile of poverty indicators within the discourse on progress in Guinea and other countries. The present section focuses on how poverty was re-defined within this discourse, as changes in the way poverty was—according to recent documents—to be measured worldwide.

New indices of poverty

The United Nations Development Programme began, in 1990, to produce the *Human Development Report*, or HDR—to which I referred earlier in the chapter. This series of annually-published documents describes a development

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model that it says is more ‘human-centered’ than previous ones. According to these and other policy-related documents, new conceptions of development and poverty are needed—in order to better capture the full breadth of human experience. Along with these new concepts, the reports say, new indices are needed in order to measure development and poverty in all their complexity. Each report features its own theme within the same overarching framework. These themes all focus, however, upon the idea of redefining development as a broader, more humanist and *participatory* activity.

The first *Human Development Report: Concept and Measurement of Human Development* (UNDP 1990) says, “People cannot be *reduced* to a single dimension as economic creatures” (UNDP 1990, p. iii, emphasis added). The report thus describes what it calls *human development*, and the *Human Development Index* (HDI). HDI, it says, is more comprehensive than past approaches to measuring relative socioeconomic progress for a given region or country of the world. This same concept is echoed in the report published the following year. According to the *Human Development Report: Financing Human Development* (UNDP 1991):

A realistic view is that growth in income and an expansion of economic opportunities are necessary preconditions of human development. Without growth, the social agenda...cannot be carried out. Although growth is not the end of development, the absence of growth often is (p. 13).

Examining this excerpt, economic growth is still obviously central to development discourse. According to the HDR 1990 (UNDP 1990), its:

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central message...is that while growth in national production (GDP) is absolutely necessary to meet all essential human objectives, what is important is to study how growth translates—or fails to translate—into human development in various societies (p. iii).

These and other documents thus call for a new conceptual approach, which they say must recognize that “growth in income and an expansion of economic opportunities are necessary preconditions of human development.” But that “growth should not merely be some aggregate number projected into the future” (UNDP 1991, p. 13). The report thus says that HDI combines data on human longevity and literacy rates with data on income to measure human progress—as a supplement to what the document describes as more ‘traditional’, economic-based indicators of progress. The report says that HDI is a “more realistic” indicator of progress than gross national product (GNP)-per-capita, which has been characterized as the singular, dominant development indicator for decades (Escobar 1999; Martinussen 1997; Peet 1999). This and other HDRs thus call for development that they describe as participatory, equitable and durable.

According to the HDR 1991 (UNDP 1991), instead of focusing on macroeconomic growth alone, “The aim [of development] should be growth that is *participatory...distributed well...and sustainable*” (UNDP 1991, p. 13, emphasis in the original). The document says that development must provide not only for economic growth, but growth that allows people to be involved in a way that is both durable and beneficial to everyone. Growth, the report says, should be a matter of “more equitable distribution rather than mere expansion” (p. 13).

National economics used to be a central feature of the discourse on progress worldwide. “Development,” writes Fernandez-Baca (2006) “has been

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conventionally defined as directional change towards nationally organized economic growth” (p. 14). Recent documents say, however, that what they characterize as our long-standing reliance upon this approach to measuring progress needs to change. According to the HDR 1990:

Technical consideration of the means to achieve human development—and the use of statistical aggregates to measure national income and its growth—have at times obscured the fact that the primary objective of development is to benefit people (UNDP 1990, p. 9).

The report says that, first, income-based indicators are useful in many respects; but do not tell us anything about what makes up income, or who actually *benefits* from it. Second, the report says, people frequently value things that increased growth or income do not directly capture. The report lists these things as improved health care, nutrition, livelihood, working conditions and security, among others. The *Human Development Report: Human Development to Eradicate Poverty* (UNDP 1997) echoes this same perspective while introducing the concept of *human poverty* and the *Human Poverty Index* (HPI). The report casts the HPI as a more comprehensive approach to measuring poverty than past approaches that it says have been based upon per capita income and/or consumption levels. “Rather than measure poverty by income,” the report reads, “[HPI] uses indicators of the most basic dimensions of deprivation: a short life, lack of basic education and lack of access to public and private resources” (p. 2).

According to the human poverty perspective featured in the HDR 1997, economic growth reported in terms of GDP did not represent what the document describes as the continuing state of poverty in which many of the world’s peoples find themselves. Further, the report says that things like per capita

income/consumption levels—which it says have traditionally been the basis of the profile of poverty indicators worldwide—also did not explain *why* so many people continue to be so poor. According to the report, “It is in the *deprivation* of the lives people lead that poverty manifests itself” (UNDP 1997, p. 5, emphasis added). Describing poverty as manifested through “deprivation,” the report describes the ‘why’ of poverty as tied to the concept of human development:

If human development is about enlarging choices, poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others (UNDP 1997, p. 15).

The report says it therefore draws most upon what it calls the “capability perspective” of poverty, which is defined as more than a matter of income. Rather, poverty in this perspective is, according to the report, a matter of what it calls “the lack of real opportunity—due to social constraints as well as personal circumstances—to lead valuable and valued lives” (p. 16).

Most important to my purposes in the present chapter is how the *Human Development Reports* and other documents describe poverty as a matter of personal *experience* and *meaning*. Participatory poverty assessment (PPA), which was introduced in Guinea in the mid-1990s, provided the ‘data’ that these documents and the PRSP cite as evidence of the need to re-define poverty, the exclusion of certain social groups from the development process, and, most significantly, as justification for key role that was—in theory—to be given to popular participation in future development initiatives in Guinea. In the present section, I show how recent documents on Guinean development use this idea

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that poverty is experienced differently by different people/groups as a way of justifying popular participation in poverty assessment and policy formulation.

People's participation in poverty assessment and policy

I highlighted earlier in the present chapter the predominant focus on poverty and poverty reduction in the recent discourse on progress in Guinea. Poverty reduction has become, according to the PRSP (UNDP 2002a) for Guinea, the guiding feature of development for the country—in response to what the document calls the “limited effectiveness” of past development efforts there:

The [Guinean] government's objective is to devise and implement an integrated approach to the problem of combating poverty by developing a strategy that will serve as the framework for all development policies and programs (p. 10, emphasis in the original).

Just as the emphasis on poverty reduction has not been limited to the discourse on Guinean development, so the same can be said of the multidimensional character that has been attributed to poverty in the country. Participation in poverty assessment has become a central feature of this discourse, in Guinea and other countries—in which poverty has been cast as a broader concept than the so-called income/consumption model of poverty that has been applied in past development efforts. The appearance of this concept signaled the emergence of participation as a dominant feature of the discourse on progress in Guinea and elsewhere.

As I have already said, the idea of poverty as a complex, multidimensional concept was not limited to the discourse on Guinean development, but has emerged as a worldwide trend. According to the *Millennium Project* (UN 2005)

web document, the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) are supposed to address:

extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security (p. 1, emphasis added).

In the preceding excerpt, eradicating poverty (in its many forms) is cast as a matter of “promoting equality” and ensuring people’s “basic human rights” to things like “health, education, shelter, and security.” Popular participation in poverty assessment supported, according to the documents that I examine in the present chapter, the assertion that the benefits of development had been unevenly distributed throughout the world—and that participation itself was critical, the documents say, to the success of the development process. This idea had become especially apparent in the increasing trend toward participatory poverty assessment. According to the HDR 1997, “each person and community *defines* the deprivation and disadvantages that affect their lives” (UNDP 1997, p. 16). These excerpts describe the climate in which participation came first to occupy an increasingly visible place within the broader, international discourse on progress. The profile of poverty indicators, these excerpts say, are not only more varied than in the past—when per capita income and like indices dominated this discourse—but also must, according to the documents, be determined (that is, *defined*) by the people themselves, whose experiences of poverty and marginalization were unique to them.

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As I have already noted, the PRSP document says that its chief aim is to formulate a comprehensive strategy to address the primary problem of reducing poverty in the country. Participation, the document says, has been a fundamental component of the formulation process:

The Government has decided to make participation the cornerstone of the process for developing and implementing the strategy. At the central level, drafting the PRSP involved contributions from all players (government, the country's institutions, academics, NGOs, professional bodies, labor unions, and development partners) through discussions within technical groups...and through the consultation process. Three series of grassroots consultations made it possible for the general population, in particular the most vulnerable population groups, to help shape the objectives and strategies (UNDP 2002a, p. 10).

The formulation of this strategy has, according to the PRSP, included the perspectives of the poorest segments of the population through their participation in poverty assessment. The preceding excerpt, then, clearly indicates an increased emphasis on development policy formulation—in the form of what the PRSP describes as the primary strategy document of poverty reduction for the country.

According to the PRSP, the participation of the poor in the poverty reduction strategy formulation process was intended to better understand what poverty had come to *mean* among different groups of people in Guinea—as something that could be conceived of in multiple ways:

Grassroots consultations were held in March 2000 to obtain a better grasp of the *concept* of poverty. The participants in these consultations were chosen from the poorest and most vulnerable population groups, including women from rural areas and slums, dependent women, street children, unemployed graduates, the handicapped, people living on fixed incomes, and

pensioners. The discussion topics included the way these population groups *perceive* poverty in their daily lives (UNDP 2002a, p. 11, emphasis added).

The participatory approach to assessing what poverty was—what it meant to ordinary people—had begun, the PRSP says, with the development of the IDH and CAS programs of the UNDP and the World Bank (to which I alluded earlier in the chapter). Specifically, in the case of the IDH, the PRSP says, “Poverty once again became a focus of discussion when Guinea ranked at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development Index in successive years (1992, 1993, and 1994).” The following year, the document says, the government began “a series of discussions and consultations culminating in the preparation of the National Human Development Program (PNDH)” (UNDP 2002a, p. 52). Improving the quality of people’s lives, the document says, was the overarching objective of this consultative approach. According to this PRSP:

Emphasis was consequently placed on securing the large-scale participation of grassroots stakeholders in the development process (local communities, NGOs, etc.) as well as external partners, from the diagnostic assessment phase through to the validation of the [IDH] (p. 52).

The document says that the World Bank introduced a participatory approach into the CAS formulation process to address what it calls the limited involvement of development beneficiaries in the management of Guinean development activities. Such an approach was necessary, the document says, in a country where government has remained centralized—despite over a decade of decentralization efforts. According to the PRSP, the Guinean government decided to make participation the foundation of the formulation process, where people’s non-involvement, the document says, limited the efficiency and

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sustainability of prior development activities. The PRSP says that, in a policy statement letter issued early in 2000, the government declared that “*participation and ownership are among the key principles that must govern the drafting and implementation of the poverty reduction strategy paper*” (p. 193, emphasis in the original). This conception of participation, as a “key principle” of development in Guinea, would seem to have taken shape in the presence of an increasing worldwide trend toward beneficiary involvement. This trend owes its force to the purported failings of older development models to reach all of the world’s people, as equity and empowerment became increasingly dominant preoccupations of global development discourse.

The *Human Development Report: People’s Participation* (UNDP 1993) says that participation has taken center stage in the development process. According to the report, “People today have an urge—an impatient urge—to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives.” This recent emphasis on participation within international discourse coincides with an increasing focus on what recent policy and other documents call a more ‘human-centered’ approach to development. Such an approach is, according to documents on development published within the past fifteen years or so, supposed to be more inclusive and *equitable* than past development approaches. The report describes the world as an unequal place, in which over a billion live in what it calls “absolute poverty.” Women,” the report says, “still earn only half as much as men—despite constituting more than half the votes.” According to the report, “Rural people in developing countries still receive less than half the

income opportunities and social services available to their urban counterparts.”

The report describes what it calls “economic and political democracy” as a “reluctant process” in some countries. “Our world,” the report says, “is still a world of difference (p. 1). Development has, within international discourse, thus been cast as a problem of *equity*. Things like income opportunities and public services have, according to the HDR and other documents, become largely inaccessible to groups of people throughout the world. Part of the problem, the report implies, is that so many groups of people remain *excluded* from the economic, social and political processes that affect them.

According to the *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1991), “The best way to achieve human development is to promote more equitable economic growth and more participatory development.” Specifically, the report calls for development models that are better tied to economic improvement and the conditions in which people live—in order to arrive at a more equal distribution of the benefits of progress. “The best way to promote human development,” the report reads, “is to increase the national income and to ensure a close link between economic growth and human well-being” (p. 3). As the first HDR (UNDP 1990) puts it, “Development must be woven around people, not people around development—and it should empower individuals and groups rather than disempower them (p. 1).” Increasingly, then, documents on development worldwide were pointing toward the direct implication of the beneficiaries of development in the development process.

Participation in development worldwide has thus been cast as a solution to the problem of *equity*. As the excerpts of the HDR 1993 cited above imply, development has not been focused on people and their needs; rather than empowering people, the report suggests that development has instead *disempowered* them. The idea of development as focused/not focused on its beneficiaries, as empowering/disempowering has become a dominant theme of recent development discourse. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001):

The ostensible aim of participatory approaches to development was to make 'people' central to development by encouraging beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them and over which they previously had *limited control or influence* (p. 1, emphasis added).

These more recent documents employ the concepts of *human development* and *human poverty*, they say, to reflect the full range of human life and experience. According to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Republic of Guinea* (UNDP 2002a), measuring income/consumption levels (i.e., GDP per capita) alone therefore cannot provide a full understanding of what poverty truly is and how it has affected ordinary Guineans, according to these documents. Only the detailed, *qualitative* assessment of poverty can provide this deeper understanding of poverty, according to how the poor themselves describe it.

The concept of 'human' development, HDI and participatory development were coming into focus in worldwide discourse at about the same time as reports of the persistence of poverty in Guinea and other countries. As shown within the excerpts from the reports and other documents cited thus far, there was within international discourse a confluence of new conceptions of development, poverty, and how the two should be measured. Again, these new concepts

emerged in the wake of what these documents describe as the over reliance of prior development models—in Guinea and in other countries—on macroeconomic indices of progress. Participation had, by this time, already entered the fray as part of the decentralization trend of the mid-1980s. Yet participatory development had not attained the force that it would appear to have more recently until the appearance of the human development reports in the 1990s.

The appearance of Chambers' (1994) work on the value of participatory research, the adoption of participatory policy formulation by the UNDP and the World Bank in 1995 and 1997 and, in education, Shaffer's (1994) assessment of participation as necessary to achieving the goals of improved equity and quality of schooling—as critical to overall social and economic development—would seem to affirm the 1990s as a decade of significant change. At least, the ways in which progress, both its measurement and its attainment, would come to be portrayed within development discourse worldwide were changing. That is, as I said earlier in the chapter, I am addressing only the shifting language with which progress had come to be described while recounting the documented events in which this shifting has taken place—and is still taking place today. Further, it is important to note that my examination of recent documents does not indicate that participation—as an essential component of development—was brought about by changes in how the measurement of development was being depicted, in Guinea or in other countries. Rather, I am saying only that the increasing trend toward participation, the reconceptualization of poverty and the emergence of new ways

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My aim in the present chapter has been to show the emergence of certain new ways of describing poverty, progress and participation in terms of one another as a means of examining the changing meanings of participation within Guinean development discourse. With this particular approach to examining meaning, I am avoiding any attempt to provide a concrete assessment of whether participatory development has actually resulted in a more equitable distribution of the fruits of progress. What I can say, however, is that the documents that I examine here show how the introduction of the concept of participatory poverty assessment in Guinea marked a significant shifting in the once-dominant perspective on national development. The following section addresses this shifting while examining how certain key documents on Guinean national development portray participation as justification for pre-existing concerns about equity and the purported exclusion of development's beneficiaries from the comprehensive development efforts of the mid-1980s.

Poverty assessment: The Guinea case

The draft document entitled, *Participation and the World Bank: Success, Constraints, and Responses*, which I cited earlier in the chapter, says, "One of the most prominent ways that the Bank is integrating participation in analytical work is through Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs)" (Aycrigg 1998, p. 14). The HDR 1997 on poverty and its measurement likewise emphasizes the importance of the participation of the poor in poverty assessment. However, the

Gender and Poverty Report (Cagatay 1998) describes in more detail the logic of participatory poverty assessment than any document that I gathered during the present study. In the present section, I examine in more detail the case of poverty assessment in Guinea, which illustrates the events in which participation first became entrenched within the discourse on progress in the country.

The *Gender and Poverty Report* draws heavily on the case of poverty assessment in Guinea—in order to promote the idea of human poverty as a more complete, meaningful and representative model of people’s actual experiences of than the so-called ‘income/consumption’ model:

As distinct from income poverty, human poverty refers to the denial of opportunities and choices for living a most basic or ‘tolerable’ human life. It, therefore, takes into account more than the minimum necessities for *material* well-being and views poverty as multidimensional (Cagatay 1998, p. 7, emphasis in the original).

Here, the report emphasizes the same basic conception of poverty deprivation that I found in the HDR 1997 and the PRSP for Guinea—which has become the dominant conception of poverty in the worldwide discourse on progress.¹⁰

The Guinea poverty assessment case, entitled, *Gender and Poverty in Guinea: Human Poverty versus Consumption Poverty and Participatory*

¹⁰ The most recent *World Development Report* (World Bank 2006) does not use the term, *human poverty*; neither do any of the country-based PRSPs (e.g., IMF 2003a; UNDP 2002b) that I cite in the present chapter—including that of Guinea. However, these document do use the related term, *human development* and other, similar terms to describe poverty. For example, all of the documents that I examine in the chapter use the terms *deprivation* and/or *multidimensional* to describe the concept of poverty, which fits with how the PRSP Guinea (UNDP 2002a) describes the concept. However, the *World Development Report* does make reference to “*absolute poverty*” as “the World Bank’s mission” (p. 4, emphasis added)—a poverty concept that the HDR (UNDP 1997) criticizes as insufficient for measuring and understanding poverty. In other words, although these documents do not necessarily or always concur on the definitions of poverty, they all cast poverty reduction as the central mission of transnational development worldwide—and portray participation as key to development in this regard.

Approach to Poverty Assessment, cites three independent poverty studies conducted in the country from 1992 to 1995. The report describes a *Canadian International Development Agency* (CIDA) study of poverty, which Shaffer (1998) conducted in Guinea in 1994/1995, that used PPA “to determine whether women as a group are poorer or not” (Cagatay 1998, p. 10). The report says that CIDA initiated the study to resolve “contradictory claims about gender differences in poverty” made by two previous studies of poverty in the country. According to the report, the UNDP/Guinean government carried out the first of these two studies in 1994, using participatory methods and the *human development* concept to understand how people perceived “the meaning and underlying causes of poverty as well as their views on appropriate remedies.” According to the report, the World Bank (in collaboration with the Guinean government) used a household survey alone in the second study, employing what the report calls, “a *consumption* poverty concept” (Cagatay 1998, p. 10, emphasis added). The report says that the first study found women to be poorer than men; the second study, just the opposite.

The *Gender and Poverty Report* report says that the CIDA study combined the approaches of the preceding two studies, using both PPA and a survey instrument similar to that used in the World Bank/Guinean government study. Whereas the household survey portion of the CIDA study found no gender inequalities “in terms of consumption poverty,” the report says that the PPA portion of the study for the same village site found that women were “worse off than men” (Shaffer in Cagatay, p. 11). According to Shaffer (1998),

“Data...suggest that consumption poverty misses critical elements of women’s deprivation.” He says that assessment participants distinguished “two dimensions of deprivation...which disproportionately affect women: excessive workload and decision-making authority” (p. 2131). Men and women in the study all reported this same conclusion, the *Gender and Poverty Report* says, also citing “social subordination and reduced life chances” as additional gendered dimensions of poverty. All of the PPA participants (both female and male) agreed that women worked longer hours than men did, were constantly fatigued, lacked “authority in decision-making in important life decisions” due to their “subservient position” in relation to men (Cagatay 1998, p. 11).

Participatory poverty assessment, as described in the excerpts that I have included in the present chapter, has, like participatory research, become increasingly prevalent in worldwide discourse over the past two decades. According to Kothari (2001), participatory research has gained its force from the idea that development’s beneficiaries produce “what is considered as ‘truth’ or at least closer to the ‘truth’ than other less participative, top-down methods of enquiry and knowledge accumulation” (p. 140). Following this same logic, the ways in which the documents that I examine here portray PPA privileges local knowledge as uniquely valid —specifically, the knowledge of individuals, groups and communities. According to Long (2001), donor agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, USAID and others have been emphasizing the need to privilege indigenous knowledge, which Chambers (1997; 1983) has long suggested as key to addressing inequalities between peoples in the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’

worlds.¹¹ Judging from how the *Gender and Poverty Report* and other documents describe poverty assessment, the idea of privileging local knowledge underlies the trend in Guinea toward participatory development.

According to the *Gender and Poverty Report* (Cagatay1998), the defining characteristics of poverty can vary widely among women and other groups “depending on the economic, social and ideological context” (p.1). The report thus describes participatory poverty assessment as one of several “new qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, approaches to poverty assessment [that] have emphasized the poor’s own criteria of poverty as well as their own solutions.”¹² This particular, localized approach to knowledge acquisition—drawing, as the report says, on the “poor’s own criteria of poverty” has, according to Kothari (2001), contributed to the widespread adoption of so-called ‘participatory’ development strategies. In this perspective, participation is depicted as both a valid approach to knowledge generation and an inclusive, appropriate, just and effective component of development. According to the *Gender and Poverty Report*, “Empowerment of the poor is viewed as critical to the success of poverty elimination” (Cagatay1998, p. 6). The report describes the participation of the poor in the assessment of their own conditions of poverty as part of the process of empowerment in eradicating poverty. The report portrays poverty and its defining characteristics in a way that essentially affirms, according to the document, the validity of participatory poverty assessment. That is, the

¹¹ See Chambers (1994) on *participatory rural appraisal* (PRA), which he describes as a method of allowing local people to engage in research and similar activities in order to share and enhance their knowledge of the conditions in which they live.

¹² See also Chambers (1996) on the role of the poor in development, as cited in this report.

report depicts poverty in such a way as to offer justification for including the perspectives of ordinary Guineans in poverty assessment and poverty reduction.

Human poverty, as a concept to be defined by the poor themselves, has become *describable* as the more authentic conception of poverty when compared to the income/consumption model—as the latter is portrayed in recent policy documents on worldwide development. According to the *Gender and Poverty Report* (Cagatay 1998):

Poverty has been traditionally understood to mean a lack of access to resources, productive assets and income resulting in a *state* of material deprivation. Emphasizing deficiency in private consumption, poverty has been defined as private consumption per person falling below a particular level. In this approach, absolute rather than relative poverty has been the focus of attention. Recently, the concept of poverty and the discussion of its *causal* explanations have been broadened. As the consumption/income approach to defining poverty has come under increased criticism, it has been suggested that in the analysis of poverty common property resources and state-provision of commodities should be taken into account and the concept of poverty should be broadened to include lack of dignity and autonomy (p. 5, emphasis in the original).

This new development perspective is defined by an emerging conception of poverty as *inequality*. Yet inequality does not simply apply, according to this perspective, to the uneven distribution of wealth in various forms (e.g., income). Rather, inequality applies, per the report, to issues of status as well—in the form of “dignity and autonomy.” The widespread persistence of poverty in the country has thus been cast by this and other documents as a kind of proof, not only of continued underdevelopment and the unequal distribution of both poverty and wealth, but also of the continued *exclusion* of the intended beneficiaries of

development from enjoying the benefits of progress. A more humanistic, inclusive approach to development in Guinea is needed, say these documents, in order to reduce poverty. The documents say that participation of the poor is integral to the new approach.

I want to note that I have cited the Guinea case of poverty assessment, as described in the *Gender and Poverty Report* not because of the implications of participatory poverty assessment for affirming gender difference—whether in the distribution of poverty or material wealth, or access to public services, decision-making processes in family and community, and so on. I have included the case here because, first, it marks the emergence of *participation* as a so-called “cornerstone” of Guinean development—that is, according to how participation is depicted in the PRSP. Second, the case shows how the introduction of the development beneficiary as a participant came to be associated with the re-definition of poverty, and vice-versa. It is important to note as well that the *Gender and Poverty Report*, which presents itself as a document on gender and development worldwide, cites the Guinea case of poverty assessment as an example of what the report describes as the ‘true’ experience of poverty.

Summary and conclusion

According to Cleaver (1999), “Although the evidence for improved efficiency of development receives some support on a small scale, the evidence regarding empowerment and sustainability is more partial, tenuous and reliant on assertions of the rightness of the approach and process rather than convincing proof of outcomes” (p. 597). Participation, described as a viable and necessary

component of development, has thus become more and more dominant in the discourse on progress worldwide not because of the weight of any empirical data that might support its widespread use. Rather, it somehow seems 'right' that people participate in their own governance, development, and so forth. Yet this is not to say that participatory development has not been, nor cannot be, worthwhile. Still, it is not clear from these documents or within the literature that participation has been shown to render development a more equitable endeavor. According to Kothari (2001), the widespread adoption of participatory approaches to development is: "an espoused attempt to enable those individuals and groups previously excluded by more top-down planning processes, and who are often marginalized by their separation and isolation from the production of knowledge and the formulation of policies and practices, to be included in decisions that affect their lives" (p. 139).

The PRSP describes the inclusion of those depicted as the poorest, most marginalized of Guineans in the development process as critical to the formulation of the poverty reduction strategy. The document adds that, "the PRSP is more than just a *government* document. It is a *national* document in its spirit, in its content, and in its drafting" (p. 10, emphasis added). But it is a national document in a very particular sense. "The citizens of Guinea are the main players and the ultimate beneficiaries" (p. 10), the document says, of the development strategy. The *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, in other words, *belongs* to the Guinean people, as citizens of that nation. According to the document, "*participation and ownership are among the key principles that must*

govern the drafting and implementation of the poverty reduction strategy paper” (UNDP 2002a, p. 193, emphasis in the original). In this same perspective, the *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1991) says that the objective of human development is “to enlarge the range of people’s choices to make development more *democratic and participatory*” (p. 1, emphasis added).

According to Martinussen’s (1997) description of development trends, the same shades of meaning that I encountered in recent documents are consistent with the “development-by-people” (p. 42) philosophy supposedly adopted by transnational donor organizations worldwide. At its core, participation in development is supposed to provide a certain kind of *empowerment*: equitable access to services, decision-making processes and participation in all aspects of one’s own development—economic, political and social. Participation in policy formulation, as the ultimate form of involvement in decision-making processes of development/governance, has therefore become an indelible feature of discourse on Guinean development. The logic of the trend says, If *exclusion* has been one of development’s problems, then *inclusion* must be *a priori* part of its solution. Inequality is, in this perspective, an indicator of poverty; and exclusion the cause. Participation has appeared as a necessary, rational and appropriate response to what has been described as the apparent failings of state government on the one hand and of prior models of development on the other.

Participation in Guinean poverty assessment in particular has meant a re-definition of development and poverty within national/international discourse. More specifically, PPA and like approaches to assessment are part of changes in

the way in which the profile of poverty indicators is now described. With the introduction of participatory poverty assessment, poverty could be described as a multi-dimensional concept. Poverty was no longer to be thought of or measured in purely economic terms, recent documents say, as had historically been the case. Further, poverty could now be described as exclusion, and. With the introduction of new approaches to assessment and more complex indices of poverty, it had become possible to talk about poverty in non-economic terms, as exclusion. An increased emphasis on participation in international development has arisen in the wake of this shift toward more descriptive (i.e., qualitative) ways of measuring progress.

Participation—as described within recent documents on development—used to be a vague, assumed or implied concept. Participation was, after all, part and parcel of what it meant to belong to a viable, democratic society. Yet within recent documents on development, participation is increasingly being described as something that was—at least, within developing regions of the world such as Guinea—*absent* from the development process. According to these documents, participation must therefore be introduced into the development process in order for progress to take place. In the next chapter, I examine the success story documents that I used to identify the site of the ethnographic portion of the study. In subsequent chapters, I examine in detail what participation has come to mean within the Medina Primary School community, and how these local meanings of participation compare with how documents produced by national/international organizations characterize participatory development.

Chapter Four: Rendering Participation as Progress

Introduction

I used a single document to select the research site for the ethnographic piece of the present study, following the criteria outlined in Chapter One. The *Community Effort to Improve the Level of Quality and Equity/Gender: Success Story of Medina, Guinea* is one of four such success stories produced by the PACEEQ project. The document describes activities and provides testimonials from local people about the community's participation during the first three months of PACEEQ's intervention there, February to April 2003. As I said in the preceding chapter, I used this document to link the ethnography to the other documents collected. However, I used the Medina story to identify the research site (over other documents on local participation) because the story document describes the school community as a case of *successful* participatory education reform. But exactly how does one *know* that community participation is succeeding, in any given school community? In the present chapter, I examine the *Medina Success Story* and other documents, interview transcripts and ethnographic field data to deepen understanding of how the concepts of participation and progress have been linked to one another within discourse on Guinean development.

Findings from Chapter Three showed that participation has been cast as critical to development—particularly as a legitimate, essential means of assessing the state of progress in a given country or region. This finding is rooted

in the idea that local knowledge comes closest to reflecting people's lived experiences of poverty, according to how recent documents and the literature describe development. The documents examined in the preceding chapter thus portray participatory development as an *improvement* over past development models, in Guinea and in other countries. Finding in the present chapter take this idea one step farther. In this chapter, I show how the success story documents portray *participation* itself as a valid indicator of *progress*.

I begin the present chapter by examining the Medina story document and the three other success stories, which, according to an education specialist associated with PACEEQ, the project originally produced to highlight its activities. I then examine interviews I had with two education specialists working in Guinea,¹ along with field note data from conversations with people working in education in the district where the research site is located. Some of these individuals visited prospective research sites with me, and also took part in the final site selection. Two members of the site selection team were coordinators for area school boards, or APEAEs.² Representatives from the district office's elementary education section also participated in site selection visits and conversations. I draw upon these documents and conversations to show how participation has been cast within local/regional discourse on development, in

¹ I have not included further details on the education specialists' roles in Guinean education reform to avoid revealing their identities. Both individuals were expatriates working in education sector development in Guinea.

² Each prefecture and urban center in Guinea where PACEEQ operated at the time of the study had, according to PACEEQ documents, an elected board of representatives who were responsible for coordinating activities among school-level APEAEs.

comparison with how participation has come to be portrayed within wider development discourse.

The success stories that I examine in the present chapter have a number of common traits. Each story describes what it refers to as changes in people's attitudes toward children's schooling, civic action in education reform, increased local responsibility for education, and so on. If the preceding chapter was about participation as necessary to progress, then the present chapter is about how been portrayed as a sufficient measure of progress. When we read these success stories, they have the effect of making participation appear to become something specific, real, tangible and conceivable. That is, it is within the success stories that participation is depicted as something that actually works in achieving education reform. It works, the story documents indicate, because we can see that it does. For example, each story features descriptions of local people gathering for school board meetings, organizing themselves to promote girls' education, and getting involved in other activities in support of their schools. Participation, as the stories portray the concept, is of genuine benefit because of the demonstrable impact it has had on actual people. The attestations and testimonials of ordinary people serve as kinds of evidence that participation can and does work—that, by involving ordinary people in their 'own' development, change can and will take place. Specifically, the stories convey to us the sense that people can transform their own lives through changes in *knowledge*, *attitude*, and *action*. These three themes are present in each of the success stories I examine in this chapter.

As I argued in the preceding chapter, participation has been portrayed in discourse on Guinean development as an improvement over past development models. The stories act as testimonials that the stated goals of Guinean national development are being realized: people are engaged in the development process, the stories say, toward the improvement of their own lives. For example, as one woman cited in the *Medina Success Story* is quoted as saying, “A quality school is one in which everyone works together.” Participation, as described in this excerpt, is a legitimate reform outcome—in which quality schooling is realized when people participate in children’s education. As described in the story documents, participation has been cast, in a sense, as a sufficient measure of its own success.

The success stories that I examine in the present chapter most often describe the achievements of ordinary people in a given locality, such as the construction of a well or new school classroom. Above all, these are stories of progress that tell us something about how participatory education reform (and development writ large) has been increasingly rendered, within discourse on Guinean national development. These stories depict people in nameable, knowable places, usually featuring personal testimonials to the benefits of local participation in development, as a kind of proof of the merits of participatory development. However, I want to make clear, as I did in the preceding chapter, that I am not concerned here with whether what these stories depict about participation, education reform, or development has actually taken place. Rather, I am interested in how it is that the success story has arisen as a form of

assessment—according to how they and their purposes have been portrayed.

These documents use a language that mirrors how officials/professionals at the local, regional, and international level have described participatory education reform.

The success stories

I examine in the present section three PACEEQ success story documents, each of which in some way describes a case of what it refers to as successful community participation in education reform. PACEEQ sent me three of these stories as part of an information packet I had requested before starting fieldwork, including one story about the Medina Primary School community—the eventual site of the ethnographic portion of the study. The success stories that I examine here each convey, through stories of local achievements in participation, a sense of progress. What I mean is that these stories describe participation in a way that conveys the idea that progress, as an advancement toward the goal of socioeconomic development, has already been made through the act of getting people to participate. But what are we supposed to see when we read these stories? What we are supposed to see, I argue, is progress *attained*, in the form of local people acting to change the quality of their own lives.

My purpose in this chapter is to show how participation has been rendered within the success story document as a legitimate development outcome. They also cast participation as a sufficient measure of its own success—in terms that speak to the same shifting in how poverty assessment is described, which I addressed in Chapter Three. Although the success stories are not, themselves,

necessarily always recognized as assessment instruments, per se, in development circles, the documents and those who produce/use them do claim that the stories provide a look at participation that is not possible via traditional, more quantitative forms of assessment.

The document entitled, *Community Effort to Improve the Level of Quality and Equity/Gender: Success Story of Medina* portrays the school community's activities during the first three months that PACEEQ was in operation there, from February through April of 2003.³ Again, this is the document that I used to select the ethnographic research site, tying data gathered locally to archival data sources that I collected from NGOs and national government agencies. The present study compares, through ethnography and interviews juxtaposed against a reading of documents, how the concept of participation is described in local and national dialogue on Guinean development.

The document tells the story of Medina Primary School, the people it serves, and their efforts to support children's elementary schooling. PACEEQ staff produced it following a visit to the locality. "The Parents' Association in Medina," the document begins, had once held regular meetings "and almost no one came." The parents' association, the document says, "has been virtually inactive for the past decade." As I discussed briefly in chapter one, the document makes several claims about local participation and how the latter has *changed* since PACEEQ first initiated activities there. Local people had little understanding

³ According to the APEAE board president for Medina Primary School, PACEEQ had initiated its activities in February of 2003—though he could not be sure of the month when the project first arrived in the community. However, a Guinean development specialist with PACEEQ's regional office in Satimbé indicated that the community had been engaged in project activities since early in the year that preceded my arrival in Guinea in 2004.

of schooling and their place in it, the document continues. “Community members...explained that in the past parents did not know their roles and responsibilities as members of the APEAE.” The school board existed, but “it was not capable of planning and executing activities to improve the school.” The story document then describes what it calls a historical lack of communication between members of the local community concerning local education. “Parents in Medina,” the document says, “explain that they did not know their roles and responsibilities as members of the APEAE”—the local parents’ association. The story cites one local woman as saying, “There was no cohesion in Medina between the community and the school. We didn’t know what it meant to have a ‘quality’ school or how to improve our children’s education.”

The preceding excerpts from the *Medina Success Story* convey the sense of a community that was lacking in knowledge, motivation, and action. No one was coming to parents’ association meetings; the board lacked the capacity to plan or execute anything to improve local schooling; and parents did not know what they were supposed to participate in their children’s schooling, much less what schooling was or how to make it better. “But something changed,” the document says, since PACEEQ first introduced the project there. Quoting the APEAE board president, the document adds, “We now have a social cohesion that didn’t exist before. The APEAE and the school have a reciprocal relationship that has begun to improve the quality of education in our community.” The document attributes this change in cohesion between school and community to a change in people’s awareness of schooling and their own roles in education

reform. “Parents became aware of their potential to initiate civic action and positively influence the lives of their children.” The success story then gives examples of ways in which it says that parents are now *involved*. In this story, the parent-community member has become more than she once was.

Citing a PACEEQ trainer, the *Medina Success Story* says that, following: training on internal governance and financial management...the APEAE has already had an impact on the school environment, particularly in parent/teacher relations.” He and project staff can see, the document adds—following training for both parents (and teachers) regarding roles such as monitoring teacher/student presence at school—that “the parents are more interested in school affairs and are working with the teachers.” Parents had trouble keeping track of “what was happening in the school. They didn’t know if the teachers were there or if their children were attending class,” the trainer added, according to the document. “Now, the parents are more interested in school affairs and are working with the teachers.” The document characterizes parents and teachers as acquiring the knowledge they once lacked and thus changing their attitudes toward schooling and their roles in it.

“Women,” according to the *Medina Success Story*, “are becoming increasingly active in promoting quality education, especially for girls.” The document says that, when one local woman (a mother to one of the school’s students) was “asked to describe a quality school,” she replied:

To have a quality school, students must study hard, parents must help their children and collaborate with the teachers, and women must be involved. A quality school is one in which everyone works together.

“The APEAE’s inclusion of women sets a positive example for both the school and community regarding gender equity,” says the document. “Women have taken leadership positions on the APEAE board and several are involved in decision making.” Further, the document adds, “the women in the community have become more concerned about enrolling their daughters in school.” The story quote one local woman as saying, “we help [our daughters] with their homework and make sure they do it.” The document closes by saying:

Although [parents] have only received a fraction of the training that is planned, their community has already laid the foundation [needed for change]. This foundation, a social cohesion that has brought community members, teachers and school administrators together, is the first step toward increasing community participation in education.

The preceding *Medina Success Story* excerpts depict parents as *learners*, as people who have acquired new knowledge. These parents, the story document tells us, have—with the help of PACEEQ training—become *interested* and *active* in their children’s schooling. They have begun to collaborate in ways that will, according to the document, eventually *improve* local participation in their children’s education. All of the elements necessary to affecting goals of equity and quality are, according to the story, present in the level and quality of local participation in children’s education. Local people are described as involved in activities such as monitoring teacher/student presence in the classroom in ways that reflect a heightened awareness of their responsibilities as parents.

Participation, as a matter of close collaboration between parents, teachers and

administrators all with knowledge of their respective roles, is cast here as a worthy, necessary and attainable outcome.⁴

“Yes! Our attitudes towards education have changed!” was the Harambe APEAE board members’ united reply “when asked if they have noticed a difference in the community since receiving the ‘Quality of Education’ training from PACEEQ.” This is how a second success story document, entitled, *A New Generation of Parents’ Associations Emerges: A Success Story from Harambe* describes the influence of the project’s intervention in the community. “The APEAE has been active for only 3 months but shows a lot of potential,” the document says. Also produced by the project, this success story document describes how the community of Harambe was “chosen...because of its enthusiasm and desire to improve the quality of education” to take part in PACEEQ. In the past,” however, “the APEAE was unable to mobilize adequate resources, both human and financial, to organize and implement school improvement activities.” The document adds that, with the help of project training, “Harambe has developed and is more capable of serving the needs of the

⁴ According to a USAID 2002 report on the progress of its development programs there, “two USAID pilot grants to foster community participation in education culminated this year in a new agreement—the Community Support and Equity in Guinean Primary Education (PACEEQ) program—to extend these activities into 15 new prefectures. The pilot grants promoted access to primary education, particularly for rural students and girls, and motivated local communities to support teachers and improve their school environment. The pilot grant in [the Fuuta-Jaloo region] resulted in 230 new classrooms serving over 11,500 children, 82 renovated classrooms serving 4,100 students, improved living and working conditions for teachers and planted thousands of tree seeds on school grounds. The pilot grant in Upper Guinea resulted in 20 community schools built in rural villages, providing access for 1,700 rural children (49.9% girls)” (p. 2-3). As shown here, these activities have claimed to contribute directly toward improving equity of access to schooling for at least some Guinean children. Yet the pilot projects worked through school building projects, financed by projects themselves with a contribution from the local community. PACEEQ, however, has not provided this kind of financial support, so I have not included these pilot project outcomes in the present examination of community participation in PACEEQ.

community.” Here, the story document has cast the locality and its APEAE as improving their knowledge of education, which has likewise improved their attitudes towards schooling and their capacity for action—similar to how the *Medina Success Story* depicts progress towards the goal of improved community participation in that community. However, these excerpts from the *Harambe Success Story* also include testimonials from school personnel on the change, from an uninvolved APEAE to one that is actively engaged in school affairs. Parents have, in this perspective, become more proactive in inquiring about their children’s schooling.

The *Harambe Success Story* describes how the locality, which has two schools (one private, one public), decided to establish only one APEAE” so that the community would remain united. The community has always been cohesive, said one parent. People just were not informed or organized towards school improvement as much now as they have been in the past. The document quotes the public school principal as saying, “We used to struggle to get things done around the school. Now we know the APEAE can work with us to take care of it.” He adds, “The APEAE in this community is different from others; parents are motivated and mobilized.” Homework and monitoring student/teacher presence at school are, as in the case of Medina Primary School, among the many activities in which Harambe parents are involved. “Parents,” the *Harambe Success Story* says, “are more inquisitive about their children’s performance and are keeping a closer eye on both the students and the teachers, ensuring that the attendance of both is monitored and regulated.”

“To improve equity in the school,” the *Harambe Success Story* says, “the women board members have raised awareness among other women in the community by discussing equity issues at [regular parents’ association] meetings.” The document cites one local woman as emphasizing how important education is to girls’ ability to support their families.⁵ The community, in which most of the inhabitants are illiterate, wants to build its own adult literacy center, says the story document, which, said one woman, “will facilitate the monitoring of our children. If we know how to read and write, we can check their homework.” Checking of homework, the document says, allows parents to ensure that children are doing it properly.

The excerpts I have included here from the *Harambe Success Story* characterize the APEAE and community as previously lacking the knowledge, initiative, and the proper tools in order to organize and mobilize effectively. These are the elements needed, the document says, in order that parents can take action towards school improvement. The document describes a community united, collaborative, yet demanding (and capable of ensuring) accountability from both the school and their own children. These are the traits of the responsible Guinean citizen, one that takes ownership of local education through interest and action. Photographs of local people and their children, smiling and excited, figured on both sides of the single-sheet document, as with the *Medina Success Story*, as if to display a new sense of optimism about education within these communities.

⁵ I describe the common practice of children supporting the families who were responsible for educating them in more detail in a later chapter.

Both stories describe these respective communities as having achieved a certain kind of progress in convincing local people to become involved in children's schooling. The goal, according to people cited in each document, is to maintain a more cohesive front in support of all local education. This kind of cohesion, the documents say, is essential to effective, meaningful community participation in education.

The third story I examine here is entitled *Responding to the Threat of HIV/AIDS: An Individual's Initiative to Reach out to Guinean Youth*. This PACEEQ document is different from the preceding two in that it describes *individual* learning, change and action—not that of a community. It also differs in its focus. Whereas the first two success stories characterize school-community collaboration, the *Responding to the Threat* document portrays one woman's initiative to raise awareness about the disease. HIV/AIDS awareness is one of several thematic areas of training in which the PACEEQ project is involved.⁶ Yet like the two other success stories, the latter document describes involvement through PACEEQ as acquisition of knowledge, corresponding changes in attitude and inspiration to action. The knowledge described here is a matter of misconception and the kind of lack of awareness depicted in the documents I have just examined.

"When Halimata Barry attended an HIV/AIDS training with her colleagues," the *Responding to the Threat* document says, "she had already heard a lot about HIV/AIDS." The document describes how the disease has found its way into

⁶ HIV/AIDS, the protection of the environment and adult literacy are among the cross-cutting themes that are the focus of USAID and other bilateral and multilateral donor agencies' programs in education reform.

Guinean national dialogue via television, billboards, radio and Guinea's location relative to neighboring states with high infection rates. Still, as Halimata explains in the document, "HIV/AIDS is often thought of as a sickness that concerns others.' Lack of information, myths...and cultural norms have limited information sharing among parents and their children." The document quotes Halimata as professing her earlier fears to talk about HIV/AIDS, "as if it was a bad word." Talking about sex is taboo. Yet to avoid people dying and slowing the spread of the disease, "we have to talk about it," she says, according to the story document. Following training from PACEEQ, says the document, in which she participated along with other project staff members, she said that many of them "were surprised by the statistics, especially the statistics related to Guinea." When the training session ended several days later, "I felt obligated to do something." She decided to hold a special training session for the children of family and friends, in order to raise awareness about the disease.

As cited in the *Responding to the Threat* story document, Halimata describes how she provided information to youth that she knew, who "don't have the opportunity to talk about HIV/AIDS, it was something new for them." Although they were reluctant at first to ask questions, she describes them as "very open" by the end of the session. Now, the document says, "Halimata has become an HIV/AIDS resource person in her family and community." She is quoted as saying, "It's not always easy to address HIV/AIDS, but we must; we have to at least try. I feel it is my responsibility to encourage others to protect themselves."

What is strikingly common among the three PACEEQ stories is the idea of *change* through knowledge and action. The stories each depict ordinary Guineans, inspired by a new awareness of the importance of education, sharing information and acting on their own initiative in collaboration with others. What the stories have in common is not just the acquisition of knowledge, change in attitudes and inspiration to action. These traits are evident in the many references to training, increased awareness, motivation and the testimonials in each story about heightened interest in education. Each story is filled with activity, in which schools, communities, parents, neighbors, teachers and so on *voluntarily* work together to improve the quality of their lives. The stories all convey a sense of *self-development*, of a particular kind. This kind of self-development is all about becoming self-aware, and acquiring a spirit of self-determination—which means having a sense of *responsibility* to others coupled with the felt *authority* to act.⁷ The stories portray the ordinary Guinean community member as increasingly capable of ensuring his own future development.

What is most important about the success stories is not whether they have become legitimate forms of assessment. Rather, it is how the stories depict the concepts of participation and development as *describable* in a new way. Participation has been rendered in the PACEEQ success story as highly effective in its capacity to transform individuals, and empower them to transform

⁷ Theories of liberal democracy hold that self-determination and autonomy are essential to life in modern society (Wagner 1998). The people in these stories are more than informed, motivated and action-oriented; they are citizen-agents in their own development. Martinussen (1997) refers to this same notion that participatory development implies democratic values. The same language of participation and democracy is present in the PRSP document examined in the preceding chapter, and in the *Human Development Report* (UNDP 1993).

themselves and their circumstances. Each story begins with a group or individuals that have been long uninformed, unknowledgeable, unconcerned and inactive; each one ends with a budding Guinean citizen, someone who has—according to the stories—become capable of becoming more capable, and doing so on his own.

The PACEEQ success stories appear at first blush to be nothing more than part of a public relations campaign, an overt attempt to sway its funding agencies, future clients and would-be contributors to its causes.⁸ Yet each of the stories portrays participation as more than a means towards the accomplishment of other, legitimate goals, such as sensitizing uninformed youth about the threat of HIV/AIDS. They portray the kinds of changes deemed necessary to empower people to take ownership over the development process and their own lives. Although my reading of these documents may appear trivial—after all, the new development is about things like acquiring knowledge, self-motivation and individual/collective action. These features are obvious, and known objectives of current development models. However, the PACEEQ success stories (and others like them) characterize popular participation in Guinean education as something that has actually *happened*, that has been or will be of benefit to real, identifiable people in lasting, sustainable ways. Participation in this perspective has already been *produced*, development's future assured. Participatory development has, in this perspective, become renderable as highly effective, necessary, worthwhile, and so forth.

⁸ The NGOs that make up the PACEEQ project all feature on-line and printed materials to publicize their capabilities and accomplishments in development, including calls for contributions to their non-profit efforts worldwide.

By displaying participation in education reform as successful, the Medina story and other story documents serve as data on the efficacy of projects such as PACEEQ, as *evidence* of progress toward projected development outcomes. The success stories render participation as a viable, useful, effective and desirable reform strategy. Further, they describe participation as real, conceivable, and possible in most any context. Participation really does *work*, the stories seem to say, and not just in Guinea or in the education sector alone. By highlighting the experiences of actual people and places, education reform becomes a true possibility: accomplishable, manageable, practicable. In story form, participation has become a viable, practical option for the realization of all development goals, anywhere in the world. According to Kothari (2001), development itself has become more than a set of statistics or spurring economic growth. It is about “trying to change hearts and minds...to make people ‘modern’” (p. 183).

Traditionally, documents that speak to progress in education reform in Guinea draw upon statistical data on, say, school enrollment, student performance and retention rates. Indices of reform have also included family health and income, which aid agency documents have linked to adult literacy and parents’ overall level of education (e.g., PRSP 2002; MPC1 1997). These documents historically have expressed the state of education development in a given country or region in terms of things like girls’ school enrollment rates, birth and infant mortality rates, and GDP per capita. Yet increasingly, these documents have begun to link progress in education and other sectors of development to participation.

I would not call success stories a kind of assessment, *per se*—although they were included in quarterly reports that USAID says it uses to evaluate the PACEEQ project. Rather, I would say that the success story portrays the concept of participation as good, appropriate, useful, just, meaningful, effective and so forth as other documents do not. The success stories I examine here were written in a way that says, Participation *does* work—it has the potential to transform lives in ordinary Guinean communities. These stories are exemplars of discourse on Guinean development, in which participation is itself characterized as a kind of progress. What we are supposed to see when we read the stories is that participation works, and how it works—as an incontrovertible element of human transformation, in a way that ensures continued sustainability through increased human capacity for self-determination. I devote the rest of the chapter to examining interviews and ethnographic field notes that portray participation as a phenomenon of multiple meanings, but one that has nonetheless become describable as a sufficient indicator of progress.

The stories presented in this chapter are just a few examples of one form of data that has counted in the assessment of community participation in education reform: the story form. The success story⁹ does not *provide* this data on reform; it *is* data. PACEEQ quarterly reports that I examined are littered with these kinds of stories, usually much shorter in length than the four, complete success stories produced by the project. Short or long, such written accounts

⁹ The quarterly report includes stories of a sort, though usually only a few sentences to a paragraph in length. These shorter stories often describe a single achievement, such as a local effort to hire teachers for a new, community-built school. Yet the bulk of the data supplied within PACEEQ quarterly reports are numbers, not stories, an aspect of the report that I address later in the chapter.

conjure images of actual people participating in “real” (i.e., authentic) school activities, providing a vivid portrait of successful reform.

The story documents that I examine here generally depict the experiences of local people with children’s schooling, including personal accounts of parents’ activities, school community achievements, and the benefits resulting from their participation in a given reform initiative. Equity and quality outcomes in education are measured in terms of school enrollment figures and student performance indicators; participation, the documents claim, are measured by *description*. Participation is cast within the documents as a question of civic engagement, local ownership and responsibility for education, and empowerment—elements that come through in the success stories.

In my reading of on-line documents gathered for this study, participation has been a feature of effective and equitable development in aid programs throughout the world, in education and other sectors.¹⁰ Some of these documents took the form of policy declarations or reports on the importance of participation to social and economic development in “emerging democracies” (UN 2000). Other documents I had gathered were more intimate accounts of the experiences of local people with particular development initiatives, such as a cooperative effort to build a well or a women’s collective project to raise and sell vegetables. These stories were much like the success stories that PACEEQ had

¹⁰ On the Web, there are examples of local participation in development in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. However, the use of community participation as a viable development strategy has not been limited to the larger, transnational donor agencies such as the World Bank and IMF. The *African Development Bank* ADB (1999) is one example of a more regional donor agency promoting local participation in development. “The growing emphasis on good governance in Africa and the ensuing diversification and decentralization processes are providing a new impetus for greater participation of local institutions in the improvement of access and quality of education, and a greater scrutiny of education funding systems” (p. 18).

published, one of which I had used to select the site of my ethnographic research. Such stories often described positive change, such as changes in attitudes toward schooling or a new spirit of collaboration among local people, as well as a sense of ownership, common interest, resourcefulness, collective commitment, and accomplishment. One, participation has been depicted in development documents as a worthy endeavor: an inherent good. Reimers (Reimers 1997) describes this conception of participation as having an “intuitive feel” (p. 146) to it, as necessarily a positive thing for children’s education.

The goal reform of USAID’s education reform program in Guinea echoes these ideas about participation, aiming, “to improve community participation *and* gender and rural/urban equity in basic education” (RTI 2004, p. 4, emphasis added). According to the Gender and Poverty Report, things like empowerment and equity are important in an of themselves—which includes participation in political, social and economic life (UNDP 1998). Fostering participation in Guinean schooling has therefore been not only a means of achieving equity goals, but also a desired *outcome* in and of itself. That participation has been an expressed end goal of the PACEEQ strategy is not, however, so important to my study. What is significant is how participation has become ‘portrayable’ as a sufficient outcome, and as a legitimate measure of progress. Success stories thus present an entirely different mode of thinking about development. It is not that the bar for measuring progress toward education reform is necessarily lower, or higher. Rather, the success story introduces another kind of bar altogether.

Through written descriptions of local people, their activities, and accomplishments, community participation has been cast as a viable, successful component of education reform. The stories are written as it to say, “We know that participation works because we can see that it does.” Yet in order to see its effectiveness, this kind of development (i.e., participatory) needed to be rendered in a way that was aesthetic and positive; it also needed to be conceivable, or viable, do-able. In fact, there is within the increasing prevalence of such stories a new kind of legitimacy emerging.

Stories as forms of assessment

According to a U.S. education development specialist working in Guinea, associated with the PACEEQ project, Washington has wanted success stories “from the field” in order to promote and gain support for its development programs. The Washington bureau, he said, used these stories to convince members of congress to fund U.S. development programs (personal communication, October 17, 2004). It was as if these stories provided some concrete, relatable evidence that the U.S. development mission *worked*, that it was doing what it promised to do by achieving some measure of success or progress in poor countries—the U.S. development efforts were bearing fruit, and doing some good in the world. Success stories create the impression that development is something that actually *happens*.

The USAID Web pages describe, for example, stories from Sub-Saharan Africa as conveying the effectiveness of its development programs, in all sectors:

These narratives represent a selection of the achievements of the various USAID programs and activities in Africa. Many relate the impact USAID has had on the lives of individuals. All reflect positive change in Africans' daily lives (USAID 2007, p. 1).

At first, PACEEQ wrote the stories to publicize its activities and successes in the field, the education specialist said. "We gave these stories to USAID," he wrote in an e-mail letter, "as part of our quarterly report at the time they were completed." He then worked with "the web designer/writer at USAID to get them on USAID's website."¹¹ The specialist added: "It's another way to show the positive impact of the program, [U.S. government] funding, etc." (non-archived e-mail, March 14, 2005). Here was an alternative to the numbers, and often a very public one, designed to convey and distribute evidence of successful development. The success story was thus being used as a kind of assessment. The level of independence that the story form has attained in international development dialogue is evident in the widespread presence of stories featured in the Websites of aid organizations worldwide.

The publication of stories of development's successes in Guinea and other developing countries—by USAID and other, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies—marked a change in how progress is conveyed. Assessment had

¹¹ According to the specialist, the USAID Web site published one of these stories on-line, in which a Guinean woman had worked to increase local awareness of HIV/AIDS as part of PACEEQ's regular adult literacy activities. HIV/AIDS awareness had by this time become integral to most all development projects, across sectors. Donor agencies and their NGO "partners" in public health and education sectors in particular have described HIV/AIDS awareness as critical to developing countries, especially across Africa—where the rate of infection has affected teachers, parents, and workers alike. The infection is described in donor agency documents of UNESCO, the World Bank, and others as a threat to continued overall development. Guinea has been part of this trend toward increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS. The vice-president of the Medina Primary APEAE told me that she had personally traveled to all of the villages in Mafou Quartier—as well as some villages in adjacent quartiers—to "sensitize people" about the dangers and risks associated with the infection. This sensitization effort was part of her regular activities as director of the local adult literacy program.

become visible, immediate, local, and somehow more authentic than it had in preceding forms, which historically had focused upon the *quantifiability* of socioeconomic progress. GDP, family income, and other, more purely economic measures had been the primary indicators of progress. This kind of statistical data was still useful, and is still widely used. Yet other means have been devised to complement these measures, as described in the preceding chapter. However, stories complement traditional means of assessment in a relatively new, almost journalistic fashion, typically less visible or commonplace in development prior to the wide availability of the Internet. Different from other publicly disseminated records of development, the success story was intended to persuade its audience of the efficacy of a given program. Yet the effects of these stories have stretched beyond conveying the success of a particular program in a given locality, country, or geographic region. The success story, especially the Web-based version, has become a new technology of assessment designed to reach a very public audience. However, the effects of this most recent assessment technology have been much broader than in the past, when other media (such as television) ¹² came into play. This new story technology, which appeals to a public and transnational audience, portrays international development as a

¹² Historically, stories of transnational aid and development have been limited to television news reports on famine outbreaks, or the construction of a well in some remote village. However, unlike the success story, these reports were intermittent and fleeting. Other examples of the use of stories are the television advertisements and web sites of agencies such as World Vision (2007), whose donor base has historically been more diverse and widely distributed. These kinds of organizations rely directly upon contributions from private sector organizations and individuals. I note these uses of stories only to acknowledge them. The success stories included in the present chapter are not, that is, the first or only stories of their kind on international development.

legitimate enterprise for the investment of time, money, and other (public) resources.¹³

In the same e-mail letter, the PACEEQ education specialist described the success stories published by the project as an alternative way of looking at project outcomes, and one that the U.S. government actually *wanted*:

[The Guinea bureau] is generally interested in receiving these stories because it gives them a different look at results, rather than the usual numbers and program reporting. They also use them when reporting to their offices in Washington, DC (non-archived e-mail, March 14, 2005).

This statement stands in some contrast to what the U.S. development mission specialist had told me about Washington's demand for more concrete data on the effectiveness of Guinean education reform program:

The USAID/Guinea website is great and [the Web designer] has focused the site on these kinds of stories, most of which she writes herself. It's unique for USAID sites—they usually just have country stats and general program info (Ibid).

Still, the success story has become a useful assessment tool for the Washington bureau of the U.S. government development mission, a point I will return to later on in the present section.

“When we develop these kinds of materials, we generally try to get them to as many people as possible,” the PACEEQ education specialist said. “So we send them out, use them as part of our info packets, put them on our website and

¹³ By *public* resources, I am including those of the U.S. and other, bilateral donor agencies, as well as multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNDP, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Whatever their constituencies, these agencies each represent the interests/contributions of ordinary people, as “citizens” of their respective nations. At least, the intent of joint, transnational development is rooted in the idea that member nations of multilateral donor agencies each represents—meaning, *responds to*—the expressed interests of its constituents. Somehow, citizens must, in theory, give their consent to bilateral and multilateral investment in development.

USAID's if possible" (non-archived e-mail, March 14, 2005). From my archival research on-line, I could not say then any more than I could say today whether or not the Guinea Web site has indeed been more "story-oriented" than the Web pages of the U.S. development mission in any other country or region of the world; USAID Websites in countries throughout Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe feature these kinds of stories.¹⁴ However, there is indeed a growing presence of stories of successful development of the kind published by PACEEQ, as found on the Web sites of the organizations mentioned in this chapter.

Here is an example from the USAID/Guinea Website of a story of a community's plans to expand the new one-room school that local people built, as told by an education development specialist:

The Dibedara school is a modest but gay little hangar, built by villagers out of wood, bamboo, and straw. [PACEEQ]¹⁵ helped provide the desks and benches for the kids, and the chalkboard at the front of the class. Most importantly, kids are learning inside. A first grade class of 64 children, 47 girls and 17 boys, are now completing their first year of school. Thanks to a caring volunteer teacher, they can already tell you about themselves and their families in French, recite French

¹⁴ Examples of stories that I found on USAID and other web sites include the achievement of gender equity in the Parliament of Macedonia and an agricultural project in Ethiopia (run by Catholic Relief Services). In the latter case, a man quoted in the success story credits his involvement in an "agro-enterprise" project with generating enough income to build a new roof on his home and allowing him to contribute toward the construction of new classrooms at the local school, which his children attend. "My life has changed...I feel more confident about my family's future" (CRS 2003). Other examples include the USAID/Bolivia (USAID 2007a) and USAID/East Timor (USAID 2006) web sites, featuring income-generating opportunities for local women and a program to distribute mosquito nets to combat malaria. "These mosquito nets are especially important for children under five and pregnant mothers," East Timor President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão told families during a ceremony marking the program's launch. "The nets are yours now, so please ensure that you use them properly. Let's all work together to combat malaria" (p. 1). Many of these web sites feature links labeled, "success stories," which connect directly to lists of anecdotal accounts of USAID's development programs.

¹⁵ The school was built during the project's pilot phase, led by an U.S.-based NGO, that eventually became PACEEQ. PACEEQ was a consortium of foreign-based NGOs, led by the same organization that ran the initial, or pilot, phase of the project.

rhymes, and perform simple math equations, among other things...Villagers are already making cement bricks to build a two-room schoolhouse, which they hope to construct for the coming academic year (USAID 2003, p. 1).

The U.S. development mission in Washington has made the success story an integral part of an organized, coordinated effort to gather and disseminate evidence of its successes. The following excerpt comes from a USAID Web page entitled, *Telling Our Story*, which provides information on how development professionals and others may submit stories of U.S.-funded development projects, in action:

USAID uses your stories and photographs to educate the public about our programs, explain how U.S. development assistance works, and demonstrate the impact USAID has on people's lives around the world. We want to convey information that the everyday reader will care about and understand (USAID 2007b, p. 1).

On the one hand, USAID and other aid organization Web sites have been filled with statistical data on the impact of education and other sector development programs. These reports highlight such figures as per capita income, infant mortality rates, human longevity, school enrollment and literacy rates among other, numeric measures of the state of socioeconomic progress in a given country or region of the world.¹⁶ On the other, there has been an increasing prevalence of stories describing the impact of development in real, relatable terms. Progress was not only more than a set of statistics on, for example, the number of children enrolled in school; it was becoming a nearly

¹⁶ USAID is not the only donor agency, whether bilateral or multilateral, to rely upon statistical data in its reporting on the state of development across the world. The OECD, the World Bank, the IMF, the UNDP, UNESCO, and the German, Japanese, Swedish, and Canadian governments are just a few examples of aid organizations that collect and publish this kind of data on global development.

impossible thing to understand, assess, or appreciate without individual, written accounts of such progress in actual villages, among actual people. As the PACEEQ education specialist had told me during an earlier interview, “[The stories] just bring the numbers to life” (personal communication, November 10, 2004).

In the interviews I conducted, there has been a sense that stories were needed to convey the *genuine* successfulness of development. The U.S. development mission was necessary, useful, productive, beneficial, noble, and so forth, and should continue; so were the initiatives of other aid organizations. Development was, the stories seemed to say, a valued and valuable endeavor. Yet the stories of community participation added a dimension that other forms of assessment could not. The story of the active, successful community was a matter not only of efficacy and efficiency in the delivery of educational and other public services; it was not only a question of providing a sense of how or whether so-called “community-based” development practices actually attained objectives of improved equity and quality. Rather, the story of the successful school community was about conveying the *spirit* of achievement stemming from a set of practices that were otherwise not directly quantified or measured.

All I had to do, the education specialist I first interviewed told me, was look at the USAID Web pages from the 1990s onward to see evidence of its widespread promotion of community participation in education reform programs worldwide (personal communication, October 13, 2004). As it happened, the results of my own preliminary examination of on-line documents supported his

claim: community participation did indeed figure prominently on the agency's Website, as well as among the Web pages of other transnational aid agencies. During the past decade or more, the Web has been increasingly filled with stories about ordinary people in countries throughout the world taking part in community development projects in education, public health, and other sectors.¹⁷

The site selection team

Information gathered during these site visits proved to be valuable data in and of itself, both for determining which site to choose and as evidence about community participation in education. Representatives from the district and APEAE coordinating office told me which sites they thought would be best for my research, and offered a number of reasons why a particular site would be a good choice. While describing the lack of support for local teachers within a prospective research site we were visiting, one district education official told me (in French) that *l'engagement* [keen interest] in children's schooling on the part of the local community was important to school success. He cited other localities—which had provided their schoolteachers with housing, meals, and other forms of support. According to the members of the site selection team, these were all aspects of what I call the 'good' (i.e., successful) school community site: enthusiasm for education, responsiveness to school needs, support to teachers.

¹⁷ The Internet has been increasingly populated by Web pages on local participation in education and other sectors of development. These Web-based documents have been published by UNESCO, the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, the French Cooperation, and a host of other, multilateral and bilateral aid organizations. Examples include on-line documents on development projects in public health and natural resource management. Common among these documents are stories of people participating in community-based development projects.

During the first visit to the research site, district-level and local APEAE officials on the site selection team described the Medina Primary School community as “responsive” to the district regarding administrative matters. According to one district-level APEAE official (in French), *C’est une école qui est toujours dans la norme*. [This community is always in the norm—i.e., up to standards.] He explained this assessment by saying that the school always honored and responded to requests for information, compliance with regulations, and so forth coming from the district education office. For example, the school always responded in a timely fashion, he said, whenever the district office for money to be collected for district-wide education or sports activities, or when grades were due into the district office at the end of the school year. It was this combination of responsiveness and ‘keen interest’ in education, all in the presence of poverty, that made the school community a ‘successful’ one—and deserving, according to this official, of selection as a site for my research. According to this same APEAE official, the *value* of these qualities—responsiveness, enthusiasm, and others—was greater in the case of a community that lacked the resources that other school communities possessed. He said that the enthusiasm of the Medina Primary School community, despite its lack of resources, made it a good example of community participation—and therefore the ‘best’ choice as a research site.¹⁸

¹⁸ During a taped interview some months later, the same APEAE official confided that he had promoted the selection of the Medina Primary School community as a research site in the hopes that I would use any influence I had with the U.S. government and/or potential funding organizations there to help the community to improve local school infrastructure. He told me that he saw the school was in need of additional classrooms. But he was also aware that the community did not have the necessary resources for school expansion. Further, it is important to

Success stories are designed to render the outcomes of community participation in education more real, aesthetic, immediate, tangible, positive, visible, and therefore *imaginable*. Through written descriptions of local people, their activities, and accomplishments, community participation has been cast as a viable, successful component of education reform. We know that participation works because we can see that it does. In each success story examined in this chapter there were outcomes benefiting identifiable people in perceivable ways. Progress, the stories said, had actually been realized someplace. We *could* see it, it was plausible and possible, and thus it could take place *anywhere*. This section focuses on how participation became a do-able, possible set of practices—despite the lack of any definitive link between participation and projected equity and quality outcomes. The success story portrays the success/failure of community participation in education learning, attitude, and action.

Summary and conclusion

The success stories examined in the present chapter make participatory education reform more readily appreciable. That is, the value of participation in children's education seems to become *visible* through the success story. The *Community Effort to Improve the Level of Quality and Equity/Gender: Success Story of Medina, Guinea* implies, through descriptive accounts and testimonials, that we can *know* whether progress has been made by looking at it. Where findings from Chapter Three show how participation is increasingly portrayed as

note that this same official had recommended visiting the Medina Primary School community over another, prospective site that I had already identified, located within the regional capital.

critical to development, findings from the present chapter show *participation* portrayed as a valid, sufficient measure of *progress* in and itself. We know that participation works, the stories say, because it is, by definition—according to how these documents describe the concept—part and parcel of what quality schooling really *means*.

Success stories render participation as something real, conceivable, and tangible by describing actual cases of people doing all of the things that participatory approaches to development promise to achieve: bring people to work toward their ‘own’ development. These stories depict self-development (i.e., self-determination) as something that takes place through what they describe as changes in *knowledge*, *attitude*, and *action*. This changing of hearts and minds, as Kothari says, is what it means to achieve development. In fact, this conception of self-determination has been a feature of discourse on development for more than two decades:

In a development organization that seeks to be responsive, the dominant goal must be to facilitate *self-determination* among its clients or within the community with which it is dealing...Beneficiaries are seen as independent initiators of activities (Rondinelli, in Shaffer 1994, p. 122-123).

This same sense of self-determination is present in the *Medina Success Story* and other stories examined in this chapter, in the form of testimonials and descriptive accounts of people taking action. What these stories are saying is that evidence of participation—as an act of (or at least, toward) self-determination—is essentially evidence of the achievement of a primary development goal.

The Medina Primary School community has been successful because the story says so. The story describes community members as attending APEAE meetings, gathering to talk about girls' enrollment, which the document takes to mean local people are taking increased responsibility for education. This "data" on the character and level of local participation conveyed a newfound sense of action and empowerment within the community. Participation has thus attained an enviable, almost-undeniable status as an inherently 'good' thing. People who were active, engaged, caring, knowledgeable, and empowered somehow embodied what a school community should be—what successful school reform *meant*. After all, what was there that did not appear progressive, attractive, promising, useful, positive, and desirable about ordinary people becoming involved in the lives of their children and the betterment of their communities?

In the present chapter, I have shown how education development specialists and regional education officials described the success story as a form of *assessment*. Whether or not this is a valid claim, however, has not been my primary concern. That is, I have not focused on whether participatory education reform does/does not do what it purports to do. Rather, my purpose has been to show how success story documents, Guinean education officials, and development professionals have *portrayed* participation as something that can be evaluated through observation and descriptive accounts. This finding shows an even tighter association—within documents, interview transcripts, and ethnographic field notes—being drawn between participation and progress than is present in the documents examined in Chapter Three. Data examined in the

present chapter show participation being cast as a form of progress, as a sufficient measure of its own efficacy: as part of what it means for education reform to succeed. I focus in Chapters Five and Six on what the concepts of progress and participation, respectively, have come to mean within the Medina Primary School community itself.

Chapter Five: The Meaning of Progress in Mafou

Introduction

I ran into the president of the local APEAE board the week of my arrival in Mafou Quartier. I was on my way back from visiting of some of the local schoolteachers, who lived just outside of the *quartier*. It was the first time that the board president and I had seen each other since my initial site visit to Medina Primary School two weeks earlier. He had been planting potatoes, he said, and so had not yet had the chance to visit me. He then began telling me about the people living in the *quartier* and describing the state of local development. No one in the area was capable of helping the community achieve *progress*, he said.

The APEAE president told me that day that people living in Mafou Quartier were all uneducated (i.e., unschooled) and not employed in any formal sense. They were relatively unskilled, he added, and so lacked access to much-needed resources for further developing community infrastructure. He then pointed towards the main road and a bridge crossing the river that ran through the *quartier*, as if to offer concrete proof of local underdevelopment and lack of effective participation. The bridge was built, he said, by hand, of rocks and cement, by local people and not machines; these were unavailable to the local community. The lack of access to resources such as heavy equipment and asphalt to improve the bridge, he said, meant something less than the kind of progress that the *quartier* should (or *could*) realize. For him, the bridge signified not only a profound absence of local progress, but also proof of an *essential* problem of a historical lack of access to schooling among the residents of Mafou.

However, he described the lack of access to schooling in terms of the status that it could bring someone as (in French) an *intellectuel* [intellectual]. According to the school board president a functionary was someone who was *employed* in the true sense of the word: in an office, usually in the public sector, and therefore *connected* to people in the city center of Satimbé who could contribute to the *quartier's* development (personal communication, December 13, 2004). I will describe the concept of the *intellectuel* in the next chapter on participation in local development.

I examine in the present chapter the meanings of progress I encountered in Mafou during my ethnographic work on participation. Specifically, I have been interested in how residents, local and district officials and others have described participation in relation to local progress: what progress truly meant, and what it took to make progress *happen*. For example, local and district officials cited such things as the unimproved river bridge, unpaved roads and what they called a lack of awareness among residents of the value of things like adult literacy, among other things, as evidence of a lack of schooling and the status that came with it. As was the case in the nation/international-level documents on participation that I examined in Chapters Three and Four, local data thus reveal a close connection between what progress and participation had come to mean. Yet in contrast to how the two concepts have been described in these documents, my ethnographic work in Mafou and interviews I had with people at the local and district level show that the meanings of participation and progress did not play out as they had within national/international discourse. Some of these differences

in meaning are apparent in the exchange with the APEAE board president that I have just described.

According to the APEAE board president, the lack of evidence of progress in Mafou Quartier signified that there had not been the kind of participation necessary to local development. This kind of participation meant, for him and other local officials, having closer connections with people in Satimbé. The board president was talking specifically about people capable of supplying things like raw materials and mechanized equipment for local infrastructure projects, such as improving the local road. *Local* people, who would therefore have an interest in the community's development and want to help. This conception of participation was, for local officials, closely tied to how the APEAE board president and other local officials described the *status* of the local community when compared with that of the city center of Satimbé. According to the APEAE board president, for example, people living in the city center were—in comparison with the residents of Mafou—educated, employed, *connected*. So, at the local level as well as at the national/international level, we see *progress* defined in terms of *participation*. Yet instead of the idea that progress for all people meant the participation of all people in their own development, as described in the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (UNDP 2002a), my ethnographic work shows that local progress required participation as defined by a particular set of conditions. According to the APEAE president, these conditions had not been (and *could* not be) filled. Further, the locality's remoteness from the city to which it ostensibly belonged, juxtaposed against its

undeniably rural character, made progress appear at once possible, even justifiable, and yet somehow out of reach.

Mafou Quartier was part of an urban area, and therefore capable and deserving of better infrastructure, local people said; they had a *right* to progress. However, how this right was asserted, locally, differed from how it was asserted in the documents I examined in earlier chapters. The right to progress, to development, derived not as the idea of the equality of all people, per se. Rather, it emerged from people's expressed sense of status—from wanting to be developed like other urban zones and neighboring districts. Yet the locality was simultaneously and undeniably rural in a way that belied its rightful urban status, was working against it, maintaining the idea that *quartier* would continue to be underdeveloped, rural. This conflicted status and its effects were further complicated by the idea that districts outside of Satimbé, designated as *rural*, seemed to be getting the lion's share of the aid money for things like school construction projects. Such an emphasis on rural versus urban development follows from how national/international policy documents depict people living in rural areas as the poorest, most marginalized people—and therefore those most in need of development. In other words, Mafou was a community that felt it had to secure its own resources, or remain marginalized, in a state of underdevelopment. Yet progress was not, according to local people, associated so much with autonomy as it was with *status*. I will return to this point in more detail in the next chapter.

Collecting and examining the data

I present data in the present chapter from two cases of local progress: Mafou Quartier and the Ganyankobé Village. Data sources include field notes entries and individual interview transcripts as well as transcripts of focus group interviews, which I held exclusively with research subjects in Ganyankobé.¹ These data serve as instantiations of local discourse on progress, the focus of this chapter. Other sources of data include field note entries in which I describe the *physiognomy*, or physical characteristics, of Ganyankobé, Mafou Quartier and the city center of Satimbé. Drawing on these data, I compare the ways in which people talked about progress with what I observed in the landscape and in local activity. For example, that people walked several kilometers to a single taxi stop each morning, or covered the ten kilometers into Satimbé on foot, highlighted the sense of *ruralness*, remoteness, apartness and so on expressed by local people. Data from these and other observations plus the assertions of local people were mutually reinforcing pieces of evidence of certain meanings of progress that I describe in this chapter.

People in Mafou had, historically, lacked access to formal schooling, according to both the APEAE president and vice-president. They both subsequently cast people in the community as neither fully understanding nor

¹ The first attempts that my interpreter and I made to recruit research subjects individually in Ganyankobé Village failed. People in the area lived in close proximity to one another, their yards and fields connected to each other by a series of footpaths and wooden fences; villagers were closely related, often members of the same family; recruiting anyone without the knowledge of her friends and neighbors was nearly impossible. We eventually approached the Chef de Secteur about working with him and other members of the community after local residents informed him of our recruiting attempts. (Fortunately, no one's confidence or privacy was compromised, since we had yet to gather any data there.) I will say more about how I selected

fully appreciating the APEAE's efforts to improve the quality of education for both children and adults in the *quartier*. This is how both of these APEAE officials described community members that they said either opposed or did not support APEAE initiatives. As the school board vice-president said while telling me (in French) about how some local people were unsupportive of adult literacy classes: *Les gens ne comprennent pas.*² [The people (in the *quartier*) do not understand.] This conception of progress derived primarily from Mafou's ambiguous place or status among local people and officials as part of/apart from the City of Satimbé. It also derived from the relative connectedness/isolation described by members of the Medina Primary School community: people living within Mafou Quartier's various sectors and villages.

I have distinguished in the present chapter two threads of meaning within local discourse on development. The first thread has to do with the *quartier's* ambiguous status as *urban-rural*. In this respect, *progress* meant a lot of things that people in the *quartier* commonly associated with city life: ready access to health care; improved roads; and a bustling marketplace for buying and selling food and anything else that people could want. Despite being a *quartier*—part and parcel of a bustling, vibrant urban area—Mafou had none of these things. People in the *quartier* consistently described the area as rural countryside; the

research subjects for the subsequent focus group interviews conducted in Ganyankobé later on in the chapter.

² I heard this phrase repeated often during the present study, and before that—both as a Peace Corps Volunteer and as a teacher trainer in Guinea. Colleagues and friends alike used the phrase to refer to a deep lack of understanding, implying both a general problem of comprehension and a lack of support, camaraderie or unity. I took this phrase, in this particular context, to convey both of these meanings.

amount of land devoted to farming and cattle grazing along the single dirt road leading into the community seemed to support this assertion.

The second thread of meaning has to do with how people described themselves as isolated from/connected to the same village, sector, clan or *quartier* as other of Mafou's residents. As I explained in the first chapter, Mafou Quartier was composed of four administrative zones called "secteurs" [sectors] in French; each sector contained a number of individual villages, often inhabited by members of the same family.³ Although inhabitants of each village and sector referred to themselves, whether privately or at public gatherings, as residents of Mafou, each of them described a special affiliation with her (sic) village/sector—as apart from every other village and sector. Expressions of affiliation, distinction, and so on varied quite regularly in everyday conversation. For example, a member of the APEAE board once described relations between inhabitants of his own sector, Kouliman, and residents of Balikabé Sector, saying (in French) *Le seul lien qui existe entre nous et ceux de [Balikabé], c'est qu'on a grandi ensemble*. [The only bond between us and the people of Balikabé is that we grew up together.] He added that there were no *liens paternel* [paternal family ties] between residents of the two sectors (personal communication, April 22, 2005).⁴

³ I use the word *family* here in the sense of the word *clan*, but have avoided using the latter term because of its often negative connotation. Guineans most often translated the word, *bhenguure* as *famille* [family] in French. The word *bhenguure* could refer either to one's immediate or extended family, or both, and in the very broadest sense. Although the English word *clan* here would match the definition of *bhenguure* more closely in this context, the meaning is bound up in Anglo-American cultural and language use. I therefore use the word *family* in this study as closest to the Guinean meaning.

⁴ There was also a distinction of class between residents of Kouliman and most everyone else living in each of the other three sectors (save some residents of Ganyankobé Village/Sector). Kouliman was where residents known locally (in French) as *des captifs* [prisoners—people in captivity] lived. (According to Guinean Peul friends and colleagues, people from other ethnic

Yet among all of the people in Mafou that I talked to during the study, the residents of Ganyankobé Sector (and of the village by the same name) described the strongest sense of apartness and remoteness from the rest of the *quartier*.

The people of Ganyankobé attended the Friday prayers—the most important religious (and social) event of the week—at Mafou's principal mosque in Dalla; they attended baptismal ceremonies, funerals, and weddings held by families living throughout the *quartier*, and vice-versa. They were, in a word, acting and portraying themselves as *citizens* of Mafou. Yet the people of Ganyankobé also talked about a sense of isolation from the rest of Mafou's inhabitants as a way of explaining a strongly expressed need for self-reliance and autonomy. According to people in Ganyankobé, *progress* meant meeting their own needs, using their own resources, as part of a community from which they had always felt somehow removed, disconnected. For the people of Ganyankobé, this sense of isolation and apartness from the rest of the *quartier's* inhabitants meant building their own elementary school and remodeling their own

groups had been captured and enslaved in Peul military campaigns as recently as the turn of the 19th century—before the French finally gained control of the region. The Peuls referred to the descendents of these enslaved people as *captives*, which is how people living in other sectors of Mafou Quartier described the inhabitants of Kouliman Sector.) However, conceptions of progress in relation to schooling and participation were present in discourse throughout the four sectors, independent of social class.

I want to make clear that I have been fully aware of local class differences throughout Guinea, including Mafou Quartier, and did not ignore them. However, I am avoiding emphasis on territory already examined in numerous other studies on participation, which have found that power in community participation schemes ends up being distributed along existing lines of local influence and control (e.g., Sihlongonyane 2001); these include lines of social and economic class. Most importantly, I want to avoid generalizations and reductionism about class distinctions—which often cloud or gloss over the potentially original and particularized findings of ethnographic work (Geertz 1983). In other words, I acknowledge these differences and their implications for the study of participation; however, these differences are not my primary focus in the present study, for the reasons given.

local mosque—the only mosque⁵ apart from the Dalla Mosque in the entire *quartier*.

Ganyankobé's sense of apartness, of tenuous belonging to larger community of Mafou Quartier, actually served to reinforce its own particularly strong sense of community among its residents, and vice-versa. The sector's need to rely on itself, buoyed by a historical sense of isolation, had brought them to want to build an elementary school of their own. The new school would ensure the local community's capacity to educate and raise its own children, according to local people, for its continued survival and progress.

Paradoxically, the particular intent to build its own elementary school served to reinforce the idea of Ganyankobé as isolated from the larger, Medina Primary School community to which it was supposed to belong. People throughout Mafou as a whole expressed the same kind of dualist sense of isolation-connection in relation to the city center of Satimbé as had the people of Ganyankobé relative to the rest of the *quartier*. Mafou was part of, and apart from, the city—all at the same time; likewise, Ganyankobé did/did not belong to Mafou Quartier. But what do such distinctions of belonging so have to do with understanding local meanings of progress? These distinctions are important because local expressions of isolation and apartness have been serving as rationales for local claims about the lack of, and need for, locally-defined forms of progress. Progress in this respect meant, for Ganyankobé, having its own school, mosque and other important community resources; for Mafou as a whole, it

⁵ There was another, smaller mosque located in the village adjacent to the one where the Chef de quartier lived. Located on the second imam's property, local people referred to this thatched-

meant improved local infrastructure in general, as part of what local officials in particular said that the *quartier should* have and be: a truly developed, progressive urban community.

Throughout Mafou, the term *rural* had become synonymous in local discourse with a lack of progress. This conflation between the two concepts left the *quartier's* residents with a dubious sense of their own status. According to local people and officials, rural was a fixed attribute of the local community: the locality was, and would always be, rural. It was therefore difficult to say how the *quartier* might ever achieve the kind of progress it wanted, how it could ever escape from its status as rural and underdeveloped. At the same time, the *quartier* was, according to local officials, less than what it should be: urban, and therefore accessible, modern and resource-rich, with readily available health care and educational services for all school-age children and their families. Among local officials who dared to imagine things like a local market and their own health care center, the *quartier* was *underdeveloped*. (However, one district-level official described Mafou as *undeveloped*; the *quartier's* remoteness, its ruralness, did not merit its classification as an *urban* zone. I examine data from this interview with a district-level education official in further detail later in the chapter.) These troublesome connections between progress and what people described to me as truly *urban*—paved roads, electricity, and so on—had the

roofed structure as a *traditional* mosque (personal communication, June 18, 2005).

effect of rooting the *quartier* firmly in a seemingly perpetual state of underdevelopment.⁶

According to the people of Mafou Quartier and district and regional education officials, Medina Primary School was not easily reached by car—and was thus virtually cutoff from the city center. Prior to making the first site to the school, district education officials described it as a kind of rural outpost at the end of a rough stretch of road; it would be difficult, they told me, for us to reach by any means.⁷ During our subsequent meeting with local residents, the latter told me exactly how isolated Mafou Quartier was from the city to which it ostensibly belonged. For instance, there was no local health care center, said the acting vice-president of the local APEAE. The closest medical facility was seven kilometers away, added one of the twenty or so men who were present; if a woman suddenly had to give birth, it could be difficult to find the means to transport her to a midwife. *Il dissent qu'il sont enclavé* [They say that they are isolated], said the district APEAE board president (in French),⁸ who was part of our visiting delegation. (personal communication, November 30, 2004). The key

⁶ Further complicating this interplay between descriptions of rural/urban and those of underdevelopment/progress were other connections between schooling and the capacity of local people to effect change, as capable of contributing to their *own* development. I address these connections in greater detail in the following chapter on *participation*.

⁷ The president of the regional APEAE coordinating board, who was asked to drive our delegation to Medina Primary School for the first site visit, said he was worried that his vehicle would not make it past the river bridge on the only road into Mafou. Taxis regularly covering the route between the quartier and Satimbé would not traverse the bridge, claiming that the slopes on either side of the river were too steep to climb; even these were rare, and most frequently cars going to and from town left their passengers to walk from the main road to Mafou. Local people frequently told me about the hazards of navigating this section of the road, especially during the rainy season. Taxi passengers literally had to walk from their homes west of the river and to the opposite bank in order to get transportation into town. Although some cars, motorcycles, and bicycles did make the trek across the bridge, much of Mafou was described as “unreachable.”

⁸ He and other members of the delegation served me as an interpreter during the visit, along with several other school district officials.

word in this statement was *enclavé*, a term I had heard used many times during my earlier work as a teacher and teacher trainer in Guinea. The term was used most often to refer to a community or school that was isolated, remote, and, above all, *inaccessible*.⁹ Ganyankobé residents described themselves in similar ways—as cutoff, isolated with respect to the rest of the *quartier*. Yet much of Ganyankobé’s expressed feelings of isolation and remoteness were imbued not only with a sense of physical isolation, but also with a sense of its own unique, historical identity as a self-reliant and unified community unto itself. I examine how local people depicted themselves relative to the rest of Mafou Quartier in the following section.

Rural/urban

Local people in Mafou Quartier described progress in terms of what they lacked relative to *urban* Satimbé—of which Mafou was ostensibly a part. Marked by farm fields, limited access to clean water and located far from public services such as health care, the school community of Medina Primary was not as urban as its status as a *quartier* implied. The school only had four out of the normal six grades of the complete elementary cycle.¹⁰ Local and district officials told me that “true” urban areas had electricity, paved roads, readily available means of transportation, health care centers and access to a daily marketplace for buying and selling goods and services. Mafou was therefore at once less than what its

⁹ Former teaching colleagues used the term, “enclave” to describe those elementary schools that were located outside of the sub-district where I taught as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea. The term applied particularly to schools that were inaccessible by major roads. Likewise, educators with whom I worked later on as a teacher trainer used the same term to describe these kinds of schools.

¹⁰ I return to this idea of the *normal*, or complete and fully functioning, elementary school (and Medina Primary’s lack of classroom space) later on in the chapter.

status as a *quartier* implied, in terms of amenities and other signs of urban progress, and yet might be so much more. That is, Mafou lacked the things that other *quartiers* had. Still, its proximity to the city center constantly reminded local people of all of the things (e.g., good roads, a functional market, fully functioning schools) that it *could* have.

Mafou belonged to the City of Satimbé, yet was at the same time far removed from it and the kind of progress that the latter represented. This sense of lacking, isolation and apartness was present in how people in each village, sector and extended family of Mafou portrayed themselves and the places in which they lived. APEAE board members, school district personnel and residents of Mafou Quartier talked about local progress in comparison to what they described and associated with life in central Satimbé. Yet in contrast to Mafou's status as an *urban* zone—as belonging to a major Guinean city—local residents typically referred to themselves (in Pular) as living, *ka fulawaa* [in the country]. What made the *quartier's* dualist urban-rural status problematic was the notion that local human capacity for progress was somehow connected to a historical lack of access to schooling among Mafou's inhabitants. I examine in the present section this dualistic status, in which Mafou's nearly inescapable rural-ness served to fix the entire Medina Primary School community in a state of non-progress.

Kaa fulawaa

According to local residents, local and district officials and Medina Primary School personnel, Mafou was urban only in some vague, technical and strictly

geographical sense. Mafou was a *quartier*, with a name, just like any of the eighteen other *quartiers* that made up Satimbé. The locality had a Chef, the local administrator, appointed by the Prefect of Satimbé and reporting to city's mayor, and thus belonged to the urban area. Yet what is most important to me in the present study is how the people of Mafou consistently depicted the *quartier* as primarily (and almost inescapably) *rural*.

For residents of Mafou, the term *rural* had come to signify and explain what research subjects saw as a lack of (and need for) local progress. I regularly heard the Pular phrase, *Medhen ka fulawaa* [We live in the countryside] from parents and elder inhabitants, both women and men, throughout the course of the study (e.g., personal communication, May 3, 2005). On the first site visit, I recall seeing nothing but broad fields, sparsely studded with trees; there was only one house visible from the Medina Primary School grounds. Statements made by local people during this visit about how far it was to town, the limited local access to clean water, the lack of ready access to health care, and so on projected Mafou's seeming rural character across the entire *quartier* (personal communication, November 30, 2004). There was no local access to health care; the school, which only had enough classroom space for four of the six elementary grades, was incomplete; and local people expressed a lack of access to markets to exchange good and services. This collective and ongoing conversation thus made future progress appear distant, even improbable. Still, there was a sense among some local officials and residents (including the

APEAE president) that Mafou could or should be something more: a progressive, viable, vital and autonomous community.

To get most anything, from bread to nails, the people of Mafou went *ka saare* [to town—into the city]. Mafou's roads were made of dirt, the houses lit by candle, and drinkable water came from local wells.¹¹ These conditions, the APEAE board president claimed (during that same conversation we had the week of my arrival in Mafou), were evidence of a lack of progress in the *quartier*. For him, the absence of these things were therefore evidence of the lack of local capacity for participation in the *quartier's* development. *Pas de developpement* [no development], he told me (in French), pointing to the river bridge on the only road into town. The bridge, he explained, was not built of asphalt like the national highway leading into and through the city center, or the many roads running through the city center. People in the *quartier* lacked the contacts necessary to acquire the resources of equipment and materials needed for completing local infrastructure project, he said—resources that could only be found in the city center (personal communication, December 13, 2004). *Progress*, he explained, required that someone from the community be schooled to the point of being *employed* in some official capacity in the city. In Guinea, becoming a functionary

¹¹ People in rural Guinea generally have gotten potable water from special, enclosed wells equipped with a foot-operated pump. These wells were built by a national water project, which has been in operation for almost two decades. Mafou Quartier had a total of four such pumps; so did the village where I had served as a Peace Corps Volunteer some seven years before starting the present research project.

It is worth noting that people living in the city center often used the same pumps to get water. Frequent electrical outages and official rationing meant that they also used candles or kerosene lamps for light a lot of the time. However, when people talked to me about what was rural and what was urban, they were referring to the available *capacity* for things like electrical power and running water. That is, with enough money and a steady supply of current from the nearby electrical plant, people in Satimbé Center would (theoretically) have electricity in their homes.

meant working in the public sector. Such a native resident was, for the APEAE president, the kind of person capable of helping the community gain access to whatever other resources it needed in order to further develop local infrastructures. From heavy equipment to cement, everything necessary to achieving this kind of progress was to be had in Satimbé .

Visiting the APEAE president's potato field one day, weeks later, he spoke of the lack of modern irrigation equipment as he drew water from a nearby well he had dug for the purpose. *Pas comme chez vous* [Not like where you come from], he said (in French), referring to what he implied life in America must be like in contrast to what local people experienced (personal communication, January 15, 2005). There was thus a close association drawn between the concept of *underdevelopment* and how people described the quality of daily life in Mafou in comparison to what they assumed to be available elsewhere. As I have already said, much of this descriptive talk was organized around infrastructure—what the *quartier* and its people lacked.

People and infrastructure

Perhaps paradoxically, it was Mafou's very status as a *quartier* of the city that brought about a sense of wanting among some local people: an unmet need to adhere to or arrive at some standard of infrastructure that the city was presumed to possess. Mafou was rural, but not rural, making for a rather murky, confused sense of its own status. The APEAE president once told me that, despite Mafou's poverty and the subsequent need for outside investment in

Interestingly, the actual, consistent lack of electrical power and water throughout the city center did not figure in my ethnographic or interview data.

Medina Primary School, area NGOs tended to build new schools and classrooms in districts outside of Satimbé. NGOs, he said, had placed a priority on rural development, which did not include the city or its *quartiers* (personal communication, April 22, 2005). This conflicted status was a key feature of local descriptions of progress during the course of the study. Mafou's dualist, marginalized status therefore made progress seem at times to be both a driving obligation and an insurmountable goal for local residents and officials. I found a similar sense of marginalized status and progress in how residents of Ganyankobé described their relationship to the rest of Mafou Quartier.

People's very existence in Ganyankobé seemed for them to hinge upon the establishment of their *own* school, apart from Medina Primary. This goal was well known among residents of Mafou. During my initial site visit to the *quartier*, the Chef de quartier cited Ganyankobé's contributions of sand, rock and bricks¹² for the construction of a new village school as an example of education-related activities in which local people had been involved (personal communication, November 30, 2004). Building its own primary school was, for the people of Ganyankobé, a means of ensuring their community's continued progress in the

¹² Local people throughout Guinea commonly have been offering these three construction materials as what national development programs referred to as the community's contribution to any local capital building projects in which donor agencies had agreed to invest. Community contributions included sand for mixing cement, rocks for the school's foundation and bricks for the walls. Land for the school building site and local labor were also common community contributions. For descriptions of this aid agency protocol, see a report by the international NGO, Save the Children entitled, *Implementation Of The Community Education Project* (2001), financed by USAID; also, *Le système de suivi-évaluation du PACV* (no date—obtained in 2004), which outlines the monitoring and evaluation system for the Guinean government's nationwide community development program. This program has been funded by the World Bank, and provides for the construction of local wells, markets, schools and other capital building projects in rural localities throughout the country.

face of what they described as waning local capacity to earn a living without a formal education.

The residents of Ganyankobé had for generations depended upon family apprenticeship in masonry and other building trades. Now the idea of having a school of their *own* had for them become necessary to their ongoing survival. This was not just talk, however; the village had taken steps to build a school. The first time I went to Ganyankobé, I saw the materials that the Chef de quartier had described during the initial site visit to Medina Primary. When I asked a local woman about the materials, she told me that they were there to build a school—and also a local health care center (personal communication, December 16, 2004). Similarly, Mafou was, near the end of this study, making its own plans to build a local market in the *quartier*. At the Medina Primary School's end-of-year school closing ceremony, the APEAE president described the proposed market as one that would rival those located in nearby rural districts outside of the *quartier*. The new market, he said, would enable local residents to buy and sell goods right there in Mafou while drawing customers from the surrounding districts and even central Satimbé. He then appealed to the approximately 200 parents, officials and other residents assembled at the ceremony, saying (in Pular), *Wallindirbe* [Let us help one another]. (personal communication, June 26, 2005). These two projects were described as necessities, to make up for a perceived lack locally accessible services that were readily available in neighboring communities. This perception was felt both locally, within these two locality's, and outside of the *quartier*, all the way to Satimbé.

The idea that Mafou was more rural than urban was not limited to local discourse. When I asked one district-level education official¹³ how decisions about school building projects were made, he told me that the inclusion of Mafou as a *quartier* of Satimbé was an error in the re-drawing of administrative boundaries that dated back over two decades. According to him, the Medina Primary School community should not have been included within the city limits at all. Mafou Quartier, he said, was a “mistake” of history;¹⁴ as more rural than urban, it did not really qualify to be a city *quartier*. Determining whether to build a new school, he said, meant first knowing how many school-age children there were in a given locality. The district also considered other factors, such as the average distance that area children had to walk in order to reach the nearest school. Justifying the building of a new school (or adding new classrooms to an existing one), he said, depended largely upon district estimates of the number of school-age children living in a given locality. However, he told me that these estimates were necessarily *lower* for a rural population than they were for an urban one of the same size. He said that the district used formulas supplied by

¹³ The official I interviewed works in the *Section statistique et planification* [Statistics and Planning Section] of the district education office. From my prior experience as a teacher and teacher trainer in Guinea, I knew that this section gathered statistical data used in decisions about school planning, assigning/affectation of teachers and other personnel, and the allocation/distribution of district resources such as chalk and other classroom materials. I have not given his title to protect his identity. However, he was at the time of the study in a position to determine what communities in the district were/were not in need of schools and classrooms. He was a district-level official who had planning authority over both the approval process for establishing new, public elementary schools in Mafou and elsewhere; and the process for gathering/analyzing statistical and other data that served as justification for new schools.

¹⁴ I know little of the political history of Guinea in this regard. According to the same official, local politics won out during the re-organization of administrative boundaries throughout the district. This is how Satimbé came to comprise a total of eighteen quartiers, most of which were ‘rural’ in appearance and functioning, as described in the present section.

the World Bank for gathering statistical data in education.¹⁵ He added that his office treated Medina Primary School as a *rural* school,¹⁶ despite being within the administrative jurisdiction of Satimbé. But what made Mafou *rural*? I asked him. He replied (in French) that the *quartier* lacked three things, counting these out on the fingers of his right hand: *L'électricité, l'eau, et des routes* . [Electricity, water, and roads.] Access to water, medical care and other factors deemed necessary to good health meant a lower life expectancy in rural areas and, consequently, fewer school-age children. The official added that the school district therefore took local infrastructure into account when planning new schools and classrooms throughout the district (personal communication, June 3, 2005).

The formula that the school district office used to estimate the school-age population was lower for people in rural areas, the district official I interviewed said, because the latter could not maintain the same levels of good health as did people living in urban settings. Higher incidence of disease, higher infant and child mortality rates, and thus lower life expectancy were due to a lack of clean drinking water and adequate health care services, among other factors. These factors typically characterized living conditions in rural areas, he said, such as Mafou Quartier. What is most significant about this official's assertion was that,

¹⁵ The same official told me that the World Bank had trained him and other education officials throughout the country in the use of these technical approaches for gathering and maintaining statistical data on schools, children and education personnel. According to this official, 12% and 14% of the people within a given population were of school age in rural and urban zones, respectively.

¹⁶ In a later, recorded interview, this informant changed his response to the same question. He claimed that, although Mafou was indeed more rural than urban, the school district nevertheless treated the locality as urban when calculating the number of school-age children living in the quartier. This was necessary, he said, *pour des raisons politiques* [for political reasons]. He added that the district wanted to avoid any complaints from people in Mafou that they were being treated unfairly (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

for him, Mafou was not *like* or similar to a rural zone; it *was* rural. The *quartier's* rural quality was the reason he gave (in French) for justifying the use of the lower of the two figures to calculate, *le nombre d'enfants de l'age scolarisable* [the number of school-age children] in the *quartier* (personal communication, June 3, 2005). His comments implied that Mafou was, by definition, underdeveloped because it had all the attributes of a rural locality.¹⁷

During my initial site visit to Medina Primary School, and subsequent conversations, local residents and officials repeatedly cited planned school building projects as the highest priorities for improving education in the *quartier* (including Ganyankobé). The Chef du quartier (personal communication, November 30, 2004), the APEAE president (personal communication, May 9, 2005) and vice-president (personal communication, May 8, 2005) and the Medina Primary School principal (personal communication, May 3, 2005) told me in separate conversations that the school needed additional classrooms. Local residents also expressed this need for more classrooms so that the school could admit students at all six grade levels. As one local resident said during my first visit to the community, the school was not “normal” because it did not have the full number of classrooms that an elementary school should have (personal communication, November 30, 2004). What the district-level official said during

¹⁷ It occurs to me that, whatever the rationale, the lower/higher percentage figures used by aid agencies and developing country governments to calculate the school-age population are inconsistent with EFA/MDG goals in two respects. First, in any given community's case, the actual number of school-age children may/may not correspond to whatever number the applied calculation (i.e., rural or urban formula) might yield. Second, the use of differential figures favor children and families in urban communities over those in rural ones. Given two equal populations, one urban and one rural, the former may yield data justifying new school construction while the later may not. Either way, estimates of the numbers of school-age children

my later interview with him agreed with this statement: Medina Primary School, he said, needed two additional classrooms to complete the full six grades of the elementary school cycle.¹⁸ He told me that the school had to be *normalized* (personal communication, June 3, 2005). However, he told me that Ganyankobé could not build its own, separate elementary school because the locality did not have enough children to fill the minimum number of three classrooms that the district required for a rural elementary school. Whatever his assessment, people in Ganyankobé strongly asserted to me their need to build an elementary school in their community. Officials of both Ganyankobé and Mafou as a whole repeatedly emphasized the need for local schooling in order to ensure some measure of progress within each of the two communities.

According to what local people and officials told me about the status of Mafou Quartier and its efforts toward development, rural was a fixed attribute of the local community. The community was, and would always be, rural. It was therefore difficult to say how the *quartier* might ever progress, how it could ever escape from its status as rural and underdeveloped. This image of the forever-rural community was rooted in people's descriptions of what they called their relative apartness and general lack of belonging within the *quartier* and city where they were located.

Isolation/connection

Common to the discourse on progress among residents of Ganyankobé and Mafou was the notion that each locality was somehow isolated from the

used to justify (or not) school building projects may, in any given case, actually work against the goal of improving urban/rural inequities in school enrollment rates.

larger community to which it was supposed to belong. Yet the case of Ganyankobé differed from that of Mafou as a whole in that residents of the former portrayed themselves as largely self-reliant and autonomous out of necessity; their very survival as a village depended, according to them, upon their capacity to take care of themselves. They had built their own mosque; plans were underway for building their own school; and generations of men who had grown up in Ganyankobé had apprenticed to become masons under the guidance of a father, uncle or other male elder. This sense of self-reliance derived in large part from how people living in the sector depicted themselves as a community apart, geographically and historically. Village residents explained their sense of self-reliance by pointing out what they described as their physical isolation from the rest of the *quartier*; the idea to build its own school was imbued with this sense of isolation. In this section I examine how people in these two cases—Ganyankobé and Mafou Quartier—described themselves as disconnected from the *quartier* and urban Satimbé, respectively.

The case of Ganyankobé was unique in that local people portrayed themselves as relative outsiders within Mafou in a way that evoked a sense of unity, community and belonging within their village. So strong was the sense of unity and the expressed need to stick together that one-on-one conversations were nearly impossible. Ganyankobé's history, origins, geography and past practices of education/schooling solidified this sense of unity, and the concomitant idea of necessary self-reliance. Paradoxically, perhaps, the village's plans to build its own school brought into full view its own tenuous status, as

¹⁸ I cover this aspect of my interview with the same official in more detail in Chapter Seven.

described in local discourse. Like residents of Mafou, generally, people living in Ganyankobé portrayed a sense of themselves as less-than-full members of their larger community. I say, *paradoxically* because the act of proposing a new school further solidified this isolated status, which the people of Ganyankobé offered as the primary justification for building the school in the first place.

By proposing and planning their own school, Ganyankobé was in effect re-instantiating its pseudo-membership within the larger community of Mafou Quartier—which was the very logic that village leaders had employed to explain the school building project. Rather than simply filling a felt need for its own school, the decision to build it served to reinforce Ganyankobé's isolated, disconnected status as well. This reinforcement made this status appear all the more real, further deepening the sense of apartness, inaccessibility and isolation felt within the village community. In another twist on the same paradox, Ganyankobé effectively owed much of its sense of unity, community and self-reliance to its self-described sense of isolation.

Inaccessible by any means

Separated from the rest of Mafou by two rivers and a series of footpaths and hills, people in Ganyankobé depicted themselves as needing to depend upon their own resources in order to survive. Two streams, which flooded considerably during the rainy season, separated the sector from the rest of the *quartier*. At about four kilometers, Medina Primary was farther from Ganyankobé than Dalla, Kouliman, and Balikabé.

During my first focus group meeting with local leaders in Ganyankobé they described historical local practices of masonry apprenticeship, and the perceived promise of formal schooling, as *means* past and future of preparing children to provide for their families and help sustain the village. But why not simply send children to Medina Primary, I asked. This is where focus group research subjects cited what they described as the challenges and dangers that the route to the school posed to local children. They said that many of the younger children were not able to cross the two flooded rivers—which became difficult for even full-grown adults to ford without losing their balance (personal communication, May 10, 2005). However, these reasons were secondary to Ganyankobé's sense of its own unique history of isolation, which more than justified in the minds of residents the building a local elementary school.

I want to make clear that the people of Ganyankobé had not, by expressing the need to be self-reliant, ever said that they did *not* belong to Mafou. Even in expressing this felt need, research subjects were careful to emphasize their membership in the larger community that was Mafou Quartier. There were two reasons why they continued to emphasize this state of belonging. First, politically the sector was *ipso facto* part of the administrative zone of Mafou Quartier; one could not, in such a historically autocratic society as Guinea's, simply disavow imposed political associations. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Peul culture did not permit one to deny association with one's community. Such as denial, or even the implication that one was not a member of one's own community, with all the obligations and privileges that membership

implied, would be regarded by fellow community members as social heresy.

People in Guinea, and especially among the Peuls of the Fuuta-Jaloo, simply did not, could not, say or do anything to imply a lack of kinship with one's neighbors, fellow Guineans, family, and so on.¹⁹ Doing otherwise would bring the worst form of shame upon oneself and one's family, according to cultural norms. So despite feelings of apartness, people of Ganyankobé (as did every other of Mafou's inhabitants) expressed a concomitant sense of belonging to the same, wider Medina Primary School community. Medina primary, they told me, belonged to the people of Ganyankobé as much as anyone else in the *quartier*.

It is important to note that Ganyankobé residents told me that they had played a significant role in building Medina Primary School some thirty years previously. Local people offered this fact to me as a kind of evidence of their allegiance to the larger community of Mafou Quartier (personal communication, May 10, 2005). People throughout the *quartier* regarded residents of the village as expert masons, a talent that Ganyankobé contributed to the establishment of Mafou's first and only elementary school at the time of the study. One Ganyankobé mason told me in a separate interview some months earlier that Medina Primary did indeed belong to them in Ganyankobé as well; the village's desire to build a school of its own did not change that fact in the least (personal

¹⁹ While I was with the Peace Corps, I recall a dispute in the local community where I taught, between the principal of the middle school and a local elementary education official. Although it was common knowledge that the two did not get along with one another, they joked, laughed and exchanged what I would call warm embraces in public. When I asked a Peace Corps colleague about this situation, she told me that members of the Peul ethnic group in Guinea would go out of their way to demonstrate to others that they were nothing less than the best of friends and neighbors—especially when two people such as these education officials did not get along with each other. As another example, Peuls frequently expressed their any contradiction they might

communication, February 17, 2005). Still, local leaders also did not describe themselves as belonging to the wider community in the same way as other inhabitants of the *quartier* did. However, by demonstrating that they had played an important role in Medina Primary, local leaders were at once able to demonstrate unity with the rest of the *quartier* while emphasizing the need for a local school.

It was neither animosity nor a lack of any unity with other villages and sectors of the *quartier* that had brought people in Ganyankobé to want to build its own school, the leaders said; that point was made clear to me from the first focus group interview with them. Far from it. Rather, local leaders cited problems of limited accessibility of Medina Primary School and, most importantly, the felt need to replace apprenticeship with another, more formal kind of education (personal communication, May 10, 2005). As I inquired further about this history of apprenticeship patterns of kinship, belonging, isolation and self-reliance began to emerge in local discourse.

A very local need for progress

In focus group interviews, leaders of Ganyankobé described themselves as historically self-reliant, bringing up generations of young men as apprentice masons and builders. It was upon this legacy of self-reliance and autonomy that the inhabitants of Ganyankobé had built the village: generations of masons and their families, educating their own children in their own way. Yet this legacy was bound up in a historical sense of isolation, in which residents characterized

have with others' opinions with the opening phrase, "I am in agreement with you"—meaning, we are united, we are of the same mind, we are unified—despite our difference of opinion.

themselves as somehow removed from the rest of the Medina Primary School community. On the one hand, there was in local discourse a strong sense of unity and autonomy among the people of Ganyankobé; and on the other, the image of a historically isolated community.

For their part, residents of Mafou Quartier expressed a desire to realize progress as they envisioned it. This local vision of progress included improved roads, a health care center, a fully functioning marketplace and new school classrooms—meaning increased access to schooling for local children. In contrast to the Ganyankobé case, Mafou officials described what they deemed to be a lack of progress in comparison with what they had seen in neighboring districts and *quartiers*. Satimbé had paved roads; Mafou was part of Satimbé, and so should have the same level of local infrastructure. The same kind of comparison was made about neighboring schools, in which the *quartier* to the north (nearer to Satimbé center) and the district to the south each had a fully functioning, six-classroom school. Medina Primary School had only four classrooms. Other, neighboring districts had their own marketplaces, complete with hangars for protecting vendors and their wares from sun and rain.

If residents and officials of Mafou Quartier wanted to build, improve and so on as they envisioned, they would have to do it themselves by locating the necessary resources; so would the residents of Ganyankobé, according to local leaders. However, the historical lack of formal schooling among residents of the *quartier* had seemed to keep progress at bay; Medina Primary's inability to meet the needs of all primary-school age children had, according to local officials,

exacerbated this problem. There simply was not enough classroom space, local officials said, to accommodate all school-age children in the *quartier*. School ledgers I viewed showing the high average ages of enrollment for students in all four of the existing grades would seem to support these assertions. One school registry, which listed children's names and ages at the time of enrollment, listed more children aged 9, 10 and even 12 years old than they did children aged 7, the age at which they were required (according to Guinean statutes) to begin school. The vast majority of children who were attending classes at Medina Primary school during the year of the study, and going back as far as the mid-1970s, had waited until they were at least 8 or 9 years old—indicating that they had waited a year or more to attend classes. Although they were likely other reasons involved in at least some of these cases (lack of money for school uniforms, lack of history of formal education within a child's family, and so on), the perception among local officials and residents of the *quartier* was that the school did not have enough classroom space for educating all school-age children in the community. A circular relationship had been put in motion, in which progress needed schooling and schooling needed progress.²⁰

In this section, I focus on local discourse on progress, in which Ganyankobé's expressed need for its own, autonomous primary school meant replacing the traditional, local system of apprenticeship education (in masonry/building trades) with another, more formalized one. Similarly, Mafou's murky sense of status as *neither* wholly urban nor rural served to perpetuate a locally static state of progress. This state of progress in turn meant that Mafou's

²⁰ I will take up this complex relationship again in more detail in the following chapter.

dualist non-status would tend to remain murky in local discourse. the *quartier* wanted to realize the same kind of progress that it had seen experienced in neighboring zones. Yet investment in the *quartier* was stifled, according to local descriptions, which evoked both its rural character and formally urban status. There was no local rural development office; development projects were organized through the mayor's office, which did not once visit the *quartier* during the eight months I spent there. (Rural districts, however, each had their own community development leader designated by the Prefecture.) As I described earlier in the chapter, Mafou did not benefit from the level of NGO investment in schooling and other infrastructure, either, because it was technically not *rural*. Ironically, Mafou's very status as an urban zone, which contributed to the local sense of isolation and underdevelopment, had seemed to lengthen the distance between the community and anything remotely resembling (urban) progress.

There was in local discourse in Ganyankobé the sense of a tenuous marriage between the village and residents elsewhere in the *quartier*. Local people thus described the village as a kind of stepchild, whose status would always be in doubt. Inhabitants of the other sectors and villages in the *quartier* had not come from the same region, and so were not members of the same *benguure* [family, or clan] as the Ganyankobé, as local people sometimes referred to themselves).²¹ The Ganyankobé did not, however, present this

²¹ This is neither the name of the village nor of the *clan*, which, in any case, did not bear the same name in reality. I have chosen not to include the actual clan name because it is not necessary to my argument, which concerns only distinctions drawn among groups of inhabitants of the same quartier. Further, naming the clan as such does no service to anyone—neither the people of Ganyankobé nor the other inhabitants of the quartier, and may only reinforce social categories of difference.

distinction as a matter of clan²² or *ethnic* differences. Rather, they described themselves as having particular origins, needs and a geographically/historically complex, concomitant and doubtful sense of belonging with people in localities inside (and outside) of Mafou Quartier.

The Chef secteur and others in Ganyankobé had full-grown children living outside of the *quartier*, as well as a large proportion of their extended families, living to the northwest of the sector and *quartier*. These ties were present in the widespread practice of sending local children to school (Islamic and regular public) in the same region. The Chef secteur, for example, told me of sending his children to (in French) *Franco-Arabe* (i.e., French-Arabic) schools (personal communication, December 16, 2004). One resident explained his decision to send two of his children to these schools (which happened to be located outside of the *quartier*) because of his mistrust of public school. Interestingly, this same resident was a member of the Medina Primary School APEAE board (personal communication, May 5, 2005).

According to the Chef de secteur and village elders, Ganyankobé belonged at one time to two other geographic zones, each of which was outside

²² I want to thank my interpreter on this research project for his insights into the notion of clans and how references to Ganyankobé residents' place of origin was a matter of *family* belonging or association. Research subjects did share with him the name of their extended family and heritage. However, for a Peul to represent himself as anything other than a Peul to a stranger such as me would have been unusual. Instead, research subjects would often refer to themselves (in Pular) as belonging to the same *bhenguuré*, or family, which often extended to the inhabitants of entire villages and sectors. In other instances, however, subjects referred to inhabitants of other villages and sectors as "selfish," or "uneducated." These criticisms were, according to my interpreter, rooted in these extended family differences.

I should also note that my interpreter told me he only used the word, "clan" (in both French and English), because he knew that I would understand the concept—not because it necessarily applied to Peul culture (personal communication, May 11, 2005).

of the urban area of Satimbé.²³ There was a sense of instability and insecurity, a sense of isolation and exclusion among these community leaders, as if they and the rest of Ganyankobé Village were not truly a part of the same larger community—which, on paper, included all four sectors of Mafou Quartier. As administrative boundaries had changed over the years, close ties with people living outside of the *quartier* had remained strong, according to local leaders (personal communication, May 10, 2005).

In Ganyankobé, local people had essentially established a network of apprenticeships in masonry, carpentry, and other building trades. Men with experience would teach boys in the village the practice of masonry; apprenticeship in this trade was generally accepted as the favored, predominant pathway to individual success for most everyone in the sector—notably, men and their families. This network of master masons and their apprentices thus functioned more or less as any school would: to foster children's learning and development. In fact, Ganyankobé's history of apprenticeship as a form of *schooling* was the most significant of all of the local meanings of progress that I encountered during the study. Here was a collective, well orchestrated, and continuous effort to introduce local children to a trade—a profession and means of earning a living—through which they might become responsible husbands, fathers, and productive members of local society.²⁴ This model of schooling

²³ My interpreter explained to me that administrative boundaries in Guinea had often been drawn as a function of "clan" affiliation, in order to keep the peace by keeping people of like "origins" and ancestry together in the same geographic zone (personal communication, May 11, 2005).

²⁴ The assumed goals of the model of schooling presented here would seem to be rather limited. Yet in the case of most all families of Mafou, children (i.e., boys and girls) also received regular tutelage in the Qu'ran, the primary religious text of Islam. For Guinean Muslims, Qu'ranic education provided the moral and practical lessons that all children needed in order to develop

embodied the desires, passions, labors and identity of a group of people that was at once clear, considered, detailed, articulate and purposeful. Although unassociated with any *formal* school, the Ganyankobé model was intentional in a way that other models I found in Mafou were not—including Medina Primary. Ganyankobé *meant* to educate its children, collectively and in a way that would provide for their futures and that of the entire village.²⁵

Ganyankobé's origins, history and location along the far western limits of Mafou Quartier gave it a unique status as somewhat remote and autonomous. Four elders from Ganyankobé told me during a visit to the Chef secteur one day that village founders had come from the western district of Telibhé (a pseudonym), located well outside of what was today Mafou Quartier, more than two generations earlier (personal communication, February 25, 2005). According to the first focus group interview, held months later, Ganyankobé and Telibhé still maintained close ties due to their common heritage (personal communication, May 10, 2005). Further, since Ganyankobé's founding, the village had belonged

into devout practitioners of the faith as well as committed providers and caregivers for their families. As future Muslims, these children were to become upstanding citizens of their communities.

²⁵ I refer to Ganyankobé Village alone because the people I interviewed in the focus groups were all from the village; residents of other villages in the sector were not present for these conversations. Additionally, it is important to note that this group of research subjects was unique among all those I worked with during the study, in that subjects of Ganyankobé regularly talked to one another about my visits to their individual homes. There was neither any apparent attempt nor any apparent need, as far as local research subjects were concerned, to hide my visits from one another. During one visit to a local home to meet with village leaders, one well-placed man in the community, who I had interviewed just a few days earlier, came to the house and told those assembled that I had been to see him—even sharing some of the details of our discussion (personal communication, May 25, 2005). It was as if people had no concern about my presence with anyone, which I had not encountered elsewhere in my dealings with people living in the quartier. As one of my interpreters told me following our first recruitment trip, that was just how it was among the people in this community. The interpreter told me (in French) simply, *C'est comme ça* [That's just the way it is (among the people in this community)] (personal communication, May 4, 2005).

to two other administrative districts before being annexed into Mafou. This history of an unstable pattern of belonging had distanced the village still farther from the rest of the Medina Primary School community. What appeared to make this unstable status even more troublesome for local leaders was the increasing difficulty of making a living through masonry and other building trades.

Apprenticeship was no longer deemed to be a viable means of preparing children to support their future families, or the village as a whole. Ganyankobé needed to build its own school, local leaders told me, in order to ensure its own future progress (personal communication, May 10, 2005). Local concerns about providing for children and the village's future had, it seemed, served to heighten residents' sense of isolation and apartness within the wider Medina Primary School community.

People in Ganyankobé used to view the masonry apprenticeship as their collective *work*, as a viable means of raising children who could earn a good living, and so provide for the continued prosperity of the whole community. According to one local man, who was a master mason that had risen to a position of status and respect in the community, "they" (i.e., the members of the community) had come to the conclusion that masonry was no longer so viable. We spoke about this during two focus group²⁶ interviews, one held during the

²⁶ Following the meeting held about my project at the Ganyankobé mosque, my interpreter and I concluded that the people there appeared to communicate so closely with one another about *all* village affairs that we might try focus group interviews there—in addition to one-on-one interviews with research subjects we had recruited individually. I selected these latter research subjects, some of whom were also present for the focus group interviews, using the same criteria that I used to identify subjects elsewhere in Mafou. However, we organized the two focus group interviews through the Chef secteur, saying only that we wanted those residents who were involved in the local school building project to attend.

study and the other held after I had completed ethnographic data collection.²⁷

Four leaders—the Chef secteur, a member of the Mafou Quartier board, the first imam and a local master mason—took part in the first focus group meeting.²⁸ In the first of the two focus group conversations, the leaders who took part said that masonry used to be enough to provide for the livelihoods of people in the community. Children brought up or schooled in the building trades were able to support themselves and their families; such was not the case today, however, they told me. As one man said (in Pular), group had come together to improve the quality of education in the community to better ensure the village's future progress: *Medhen no bati dho, ko jannugol ngol tawi weltano on. Haray ko en yahi yeso* [We have come together here so that our children will have a good education. Then, the village will advance, go forward.] The community wanted to get whatever district approvals and material aid necessary to establish its own formal school, he said. He then added, *Ko en yahu ka yeeso no bhuri yahu ka*

²⁷ I held the second group conversation, which was not an interview at all, the day before my departure from the research site. In the interests of providing some benefit to Ganyankobé after completing data collection, I had offered to advise local leaders on approaching non-governmental organizations about getting financial support for building the school. I did this for two reasons. First, given the number of inhabitants and my own estimate of the number of school-age children in the area (using actual population figures provided by the Chef du quartier), district officials might have agreed with Ganyankobé's proposal to build its own school. Second, the community had asked me to do so. Much of this second conversation turned around the content and context of the first focus group interview, in which local leaders described for me how they had acquired the authorization to build a school in the sector (personal communication, May 10, 2005). Although this second meeting was not directly pertinent to the dissertation, I do want the reader to know that a second group conversation took place, and also the context of this meeting.

²⁸ These were the principal players taking part in the first focus group, although there were other men present—none of whom actually spoke during the meeting. I had asked the *Chef secteur* to assemble all those who were involved in the proposed school building project for the meeting, which took place at the master mason's house.

bhaawo. [Because it is better to progress than to regress.]²⁹ (personal communication, May 10, 2005).

Local leaders in Ganyankobé had come together, they told me, to improve the local mosque and to build their own school. The imam of the local mosque said that, before the sector or village had become part of Mafou, residents attended the Friday prayers in Fallé (a pseudonym). When Sekou Touré was still in power, he said, Ganyankobé was part of the District of Fallé, which is located to the northwest of Mafou. When Lansana Conté came to power, the village/sector was annexed into the district of Jaaba (a pseudonym). Ganyakobe residents then began attending Friday prayers in Jaaba. Once the village was annexed into Mafou, the principal mosque of the *quartier* in Dalla was too far, he said, for the people of Ganyankobé to travel every Friday to attend this special weekly prayer. The local community needed to improve its own mosque, so that local people might attend Friday prayers there. The *Chef secteur* added that they were working together so that, first, they might have their own mosque and be able to hold the Friday prayers in their own community. Second, they wanted to build their own school, he said (in Pular) so that their children would not have to go to school elsewhere—outside of the immediate community. *Men haldi e jukkere endan* [We have agreed and are united], he said. *Sabu jidhin men...golle en hoore*. [These are the reasons why we...are working towards these ends.] It was their greatest wish, he added, to achieve these two goals (personal communication, May 10, 2005).

²⁹ I am relying wholly on my interpreter's translation, in which he specifically used the words, *progress* and *regress*.

What is significant about the Ganyankobé's expressed desire to build its own elementary school and mosque was how leaders at the first focus group interview talked about their needs in terms of their historically tenuous administrative status. Residents had, since the founding of the village some thirty years earlier, belonged to three different *quartiers* or districts. They had had to attend Friday prayers in mosques all over the region, depending upon the organization of administrative boundaries. This history, coupled with the distances they had had to travel, them and their children, to go the mosque and attend school was for them sufficient justification for completing the local mosque and building their own elementary school. This tenuous history only further reinforced local bonds and rendered those between them and other residents of Mafou less solid than they might otherwise have been. In this perspective, it is important to understand that it was not Ganyankobé's realization that formal schooling might provide a better way of life for local children and their families, per se, that they were expressing. Rather, it was the idea that a school of its own was for local people borne out of a felt necessity to take care of their own. *They* had to ensure the continued survival and prosperity of the village while providing the means for a more viable form of education: their own local, formal school.

It is important to understand the local school project in Ganyankobé as not so much a question of an *absence* of schooling as it was of a need for a different *kind* of schooling. Local apprenticeship in building trades had provided a viable means of ensuring families' livelihoods and the village's continued prosperity. Evidence also existed in the form of local development. The construction of the

local mosque, Medina Primary School, and the modern, tiled homes built by Ganyankobé men and their sons attested to the success of this kind of schooling in ensuring individual and village progress. Rather, the need for a local school was more about replacing a form of education that was deemed by members of the community to be no longer sufficient to meet the village's needs.

People in Ganyankobé described how generations of their sons had apprenticed as masons under their fathers, uncles, elder brothers, and so on. So many of the village's inhabitants had apprenticed in masonry, carpentry, and other building trades that they had become *the* principal trade/profession available to local men and their families.³⁰ The local conception of schooling, then, extended beyond the formal classroom or adult literacy course to other forms of learning created by and for local people. The practice of apprenticeship functioned, in effect, as a kind of school: conceived, designed, organized and staffed entirely by local people for the education of their children. As is the case in documents on development produced at the national/international level, education was for the people of Ganyankobé necessary to development, to progress—albeit in a different way. Here in this village was an organized effort, wholly initiated by and for local inhabitants, which functioned essentially as any

³⁰ There are two points I want to raise here. First, men and men alone practiced masonry. Men were also described in local discourse as the primary, if not sole, providers for their families. Second, documents published by the Guinean government, the World Bank, UNESCO, and other aid organizations depict agriculture (and especially *subsistence agriculture*) as critical to people living in rural areas of the country. In fact, everyone I met or worked with during the study planted *something*—rice, potatoes, corn, tomatoes, and other agricultural products. Yet agriculture was not (necessarily) the primary source of income for everyone in Ganyankobé. It is important to note here as well that women not only worked the farm fields, performed care giving, and other tasks of making and keeping a home. They also supplemented family incomes by dyeing and selling fabric, selling produce in the city, and through their engagement in other income-generating activities.

school would: to prepare children for adult life and productive roles in society. Contrary to policy documents and studies of community participation that describe local people to be lacking in the knowledge required to understand education and to participate in it (e.g., Chapman et al. 2002; Tsayang 1998), the people of Ganyankobé demonstrated significant understanding of their own educational needs.

The Ganyankobé case was significant in that an entire community saw itself as built, literally, by local masons—who in turned trained generations of their children to continue in the profession and help the community grow. For example, as the local Chef secteur told me, he had built his own house using methods of masonry that predated the widespread use of cement blocks and mortar in Guinea (personal communication, December 16, 2005). (One elderly man, arriving during a visit I made to see the former, claimed to have taught him how.) As with the Saliibhe meeting discussed earlier, I was interested in how the people of Ganyankobé described their own roles as participants in children's schooling. The masonry apprenticeship was at one time a legitimate form of schooling, one in which almost every inhabitant of Ganyankobé took part. Raising one's son to be a mason, then, had been a recognized role that local people could and did play in a child's education.

Ganyankobé's inhabitants had collectively, they told me, decided upon masonry and other building trades as the means through which the village would sustain itself—to ensure its posterity. The masonry apprenticeship had served, therefore, as any school would, more or less. There was no official building

dedicated to, or sanctioned for, this purpose; there were no assigned teachers, beyond the fathers, uncles, and other local men experienced in masonry. There were no “classes,” no textbooks, and no (formal) curriculum of any kind. Yet according to local descriptions of this history of apprenticeship, the collective practice of bringing boys into the trade or profession of masonry otherwise functioned as any form of *schooling* would: to provide knowledge, guidance and practical experience to children under the tutelage of a more knowledgeable “other.”³¹

I want to note here that not everyone in Ganyankobé agreed with the plans for the new school. One local mason, who was living in the sector just downhill from the Ganyankobé mosque, told me during a later conversation that he agreed with the idea of building a school in the area. He just did not agree, he said, with the chosen location.³² (I had learned during the focus group meeting, the *Chef secteur* had donated a plot of land for the proposed school, which was located along the northern boundary of the *quartier* and sector. The land was located on the opposite side of the village from where the mason lived.) As I was leaving the mason’s home that day he began telling me how the school would serve only Ganyankobé, Fallé and two other localities he named—all of which were located outside of Mafou Quartier. He waved his hand to the west as he said this, toward and beyond Ganyankobé’s northwest boundary. He said, *Ko*

³¹ I am borrowing here from concepts of so-called practical learning found in Schön’s (1983), *The reflective practitioner*. The text describes how professions from law to medicine induct students into a given practice in the United States, under the guidance of a more knowledgeable, experienced professional.

³² When I mentioned to a local mechanic and research subject late the following month that I would be staying with the mason in question the following week, the former said of the latter, *Bhe tawaakaa halde*. [He is not in agreement with us regarding the proposed school.]

huccugol [It is turning one's back.] That is, he was saying that building the school on the plot of land donated for this purpose, on the opposite side of the sector was tantamount to turning one's back on the rest of the *quartier*/community. As the mason accompanied me toward the path to Balikabé and away from Ganyankobé, he added that the school would be better situated if it was built "here." He stopped walking as he said this, directing his hands toward the ground at a point along the path leading downhill and outside of Ganyankobé Village proper (personal communication, May 28, 2005). We then shook hands and I continued on my way back to Balikabé.

Several things were remarkable about the visit with the mason in Ganyankobé that I just described, and his remarks about the proposed school. First, he was casting the village/sector as belonging to the same larger community of Mafou Quartier. Second, he was, at the same time, positioning those who were planning on building the school on land located to the far boundary of Ganyankobé Secteur as serving only themselves and people living outside the *quartier*. Third, and most importantly, the mason was describing the act of building a school away from the rest of the *quartier* as *betraying* the other residents of the larger community to which they all belonged. This statement served to place the mason squarely with this larger community and those planning the school as disloyal to it.³³ According to him, there was a need to

³³ It is important to note here that the mason in question was, four years previously, the Chef secteur of Ganyankobé. According to statistical data supplied by the Chef quartier, an uncle of the current Chef secteur then succeeded the mason. The uncle served just over two years, until the current Chef secteur was named. I also want to note that the mason was a member of the Medina Primary APEAE board, along with his half brother, a man who was married to the sister of the APEAE board president. These kinds of family connections were recurrent throughout the board, despite the appearance of more or less equal, democratic representation of each sector.

provide ready access to schooling right there in Ganyankobé. But self-reliance and progress did not have to come, he indicated, at the expense of social unity and equal access to the school within the larger community of Mafou Quartier.

Living downhill as the mason did from Ganyankobé Village, he did not belong to the same family as the village's inhabitants. He was of a lower caste; another of his brothers was married to a resident of Kouliman, who were the descendants of former *captives*; plus, he lived just above the nearby river. This arrangement between people of higher and lower status was typical within Peul communities. Additionally, people of high social standing did not generally take a wife of lower social standing. Although this was not universally true, that he and his family lived downhill served to confirm my conclusions about his status.³⁴

Whatever the mason's status, he made reference to the history of the school planners, citing the names of villages that coincided with their origins as they had described them—which was a history in which he did not share. By arguing that the school should be built down the hill, on his side of the sector, the mason was affirming his status as, simultaneously, a relative *outsider* to the village community uphill and as more closely associated with the larger community than the residents of Ganyankobé Village.

In fact, six of nine board members, including the president and acting vice-president, were members of the same family—by birth or by marriage. Although this aspect of board representation is noteworthy, it is not my primary concern in the present analysis. Rather than speculate, however, on the possible political implications of what the mason told me about the proposed school building site, his current and past leadership roles, and so on, I am simply including the information here as it was presented to me. I am only interested in the effects of his statements, as a local education authority, on the meaning of the proposed school.

³⁴ My interpreter explained to me how people living in lower elevations—especially near watercourses such as the river running just beyond the mason's compound—belonged to a lower caste than those living up above, on the hillside. He said he was sure that this was the case with the mason and his family (personal communication, March 7, 2005).

I am recounting these conversations with the mason and their meanings only to confirm the conception of Ganyankobé Village residents as relative outsiders in Mafou Quartier. Their history, origins, geography, and past practices of education/schooling solidified this conception. Paradoxically, perhaps, the conversation with the mason living down the hill from the village brought to light the significance of the school building project to Ganyankobé's status as less-than-full members of the larger, Medina Primary School community. By proposing and planning their own school, Ganyankobé was in effect establishing its pseudo-membership within the larger community of Mafou Quartier—the very reason that village leaders had employed to justify the project. Further, the decision to build a school re-confirmed the village's need to rely upon its own resources rather than those of the *quartier* at large or the government. In effect, Ganyankobé effectively owed much of its sense of unity, community, and self-reliance to its sense of apartness.

Summary and conclusion

Throughout Mafou Quartier, the concept of *rural* had become a fixed attribute of the local community; the locality was, and, according to local officials, always would be rural. It was therefore unclear at the time of the study how the *quartier* might ever achieve *progress*, how it could ever escape from its status as rural and thus undeveloped. The troublesome connections forged by local people between progress and what they described as truly *urban*—paved roads, electricity, and so on that were indicators of progress—had effectively rooted the *quartier* in a seemingly perpetual state of underdevelopment. Further

complicating this interplay between descriptions of rural/urban and those of underdevelopment/progress were connections between the historical lack of schooling and a lack of the kind of participation that the *quartier* truly needed. According to local people, community development required a special kind of participation; certain conditions had to be filled. The community, people said, needed connections in the city center in order to obtain the materials and other resources that progress required. However, local people took the lack of local progress of the kind they envisioned as proof that this special kind of participation did not exist. These local meanings of progress stand in contrast to how progress is portrayed in the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (UNDP 2002a) and other documents I examined in Chapter Three, as requiring the participation of all people in order to succeed. In contrast, the people of Mafou Quartier were depending upon a person that did not exist.

A certain standard of progress, or of successful development, had come to define what Mafou Quartier was/was not, according to local people. Technically speaking, Mafou was urban; it belonged, along with seventeen other *quartiers*, to the City of Satimbé. Yet local people consistently described themselves as living *in the country*. Satimbé meant a bustling central market where people bought and sold food, hardware, household goods, and clothing. Mafou had none of these things. Satimbé was where the people of Mafou went to work; to sell the vegetables they had grown, or cloth they had made, and the livestock they had raised. It was at once a part of one of Guinea's largest cities, and yet far, far removed from anything that one would call urban. Mafou more closely resembled

the kind of rural farm community that should have received greater attention from aid programs, according to the PRSP. It was, for all intents and purposes, rural, marginalized and in need of investment. However, its official status as an urban zone meant for local officials that the NGOs working in the region would be putting their money elsewhere, in the so-called rural districts located outside of the urban area of Satimbé. According to local officials, if Mafou wanted to achieve the kind of progress it envisioned, then it would have to secure its own resources; people in Ganyankobé likewise portrayed their community as needed to be self-sufficient for the continued survival of the village.

What is most significant about the findings on progress presented in the present chapter is how Mafou's rural character and urban designation actually meant *less* development investment and control over its own destiny. From all appearances and local descriptions, the community was as deserving of development assistance as any officially designated *rural* locality in the region; yet local officials did not see this kind of aid coming anytime soon to a designated *urban* area. Further, Mafou was too far from the city center to benefit from urban development; people in Ganyankobé expressed a similar sense of its own remoteness, apartness and marginalization. The case is therefore significant not because it is somehow representative of the average Guinean community. Rather, it shows how marginalized a locality can be, despite evidence that it should not be.

Poverty and marginalization do, according to national/international-level documents on development, certainly exist in urban areas. Yet neither

Ganyankobé nor Mafou Quartier would be described as cases of classic, urban poverty: absence of (otherwise available) city services, crowded/unsanitary living conditions, unemployment, and so on. The local economic base was more characteristic of subsistence and small, commercial agriculture. Rather, the people of Mafou have been portraying themselves as poor and marginalized both because they have been too far from the city center to benefit from urban development, yet somehow too close to it to benefit from rural-focused development aid. The gap between the community's anomalous, conflicted status and any real progress thus appeared for local people to be too wide to cross at times. Mafou was therefore underdeveloped, according to the school board president, because it did not have access to resources he said could only be found in the city. Both Ganyankobé and Mafou have described a sense of needing, because of their relative isolation, to develop their own resources since they could not, they said, rely on anyone else. The lack of local progress was, for the school board president, testimony to a lack of access to these kinds of resources—which he said could only come through contacts of their own, where these resources were located: in the city center. Only this particular kind of participation could bridge the perceived gap between the local community and real progress. I take up this idea of participation in local development in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: The Meaning of Participation in Mafou

Introduction

Participation in the development of Mafou Quartier meant a number of things. First, it meant having access to the financial/material resources in order to contribute to local building projects, teachers' salaries and the like. In this perspective, participation meant having a certain *status*: being connected to the human and material resources necessary to local development. Second, participation meant having the willingness or sense of social *obligation* to act by contributing to local progress. This sense of obligation, this need/desire to 'give back' to the community in some meaningful way, permeated virtually every event and conversation that I recorded during the study.

Unlike how the policy documents that I examined in Chapter Three portray participation, as a matter of collective ownership and responsibility, in Mafou Quartier there was a constant expectation to show concern for and be involved in the daily lives of others close to oneself: neighbors, friends, children and parents. My findings show that this expectation derived, however, more from the sense of life's unpredictability than from any egalitarian notion of shared ownership of schooling, or anything else within the community. Regardless, according to how local officials described things, participation of the kind that they deemed necessary to development was almost non-existent; they offered the apparent lack of progress in the *quartier* as evidence of the inadequacy of local participation in community development. According to how local people portrayed

themselves and their community, achieving progress therefore appeared possible (in theory), just not very likely.

At the same time, as I said in the preceding chapter, the local community was cast as pervasively and almost inescapably rural: underdeveloped. The image of the rural/underdeveloped locality had so pervaded local discourse that the kind of participation that local officials told me was necessary to community progress seemed elusive; for them, the absence of local development stood as a constant reminder of local incapacity to improve things. A nearly fixed image of the rural, underdeveloped community had formed, making effective (i.e., successful) participation appear at best to be a remote possibility. A circular relationship had formed, in which the community's historically underdeveloped state and the idea that effective, meaningful participation was hard to come by tended to reinforce one another. These two images thus made future development seem difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Throughout the present study I examined local discourse for the possible or available meanings of participation in community progress—including education reform. When I say *available*, I am referring to meanings that are conceivable—that is, that are present—within local discourse. In the case of the local context, I found that participation has played a particular role in community affairs, and not others. Specifically, the meaning of participation within the local context has not been tied to the same idea of ownership/responsibility encountered within policy documents on Guinean development. According to people in the Medina Primary School community, participation was necessary to

progress—which is how the national/international-level documents examined in the study describe the two concepts. However, progress for local officials required a special kind of participation: not the full participation of all members (i.e., citizens) of the community, as described in these documents, but rather, the participation of a select few people deemed to have status, wealth and influence. In other words, the idea that all parents might participate, equally, in local schooling was just not available, conceivable or possible.

In the present chapter, I examine conversation and activity in Mafou Quartier for local meanings of progress. What I found was a set of complex, circular ideas, which contrast with my reading of the documents that I examined in Chapter Three. According to the PRSP and other documents, the benefits of progress were unevenly distributed among different segments of Guinea's population. The PRSP treats this situation as evidence of a historical lack of popular involvement in the development process. In Mafou, the APEAE board president saw signs of underdevelopment and a general lack of progress. As with the PRSP, he took this lack of progress as evidence of a historical lack of participation. But unlike the PRSP, residents and officials in Mafou emphasized the need for a particular kind of participation. This kind of participation was about intellectual status, and the notion that some prosperous resident would come through with the resources to cover local projects. To give back, one had to have made it, become prosperous; to make it in turn required the support of family and community. The idea that local residents must support one another was a strong in local discourse. If one had the resources to help, she was obligated to do so.

People could therefore avoid this obligation by claiming a lack of money, and so on—whether or not the claim was actually true. These dynamics combined to create a small group of people who were called, ‘prosperous,’ and a much larger group of people who were not. This idea of limited local capacity to participate in any meaningful form of progress has permeated local discourse, to the point where simple, popular participation seemed unreliable, insignificant and at times inconsequential.

Methods

In the present chapter I draw upon the work of Michel Foucault (1981) on the functioning of discourse, and that of Clifford Geertz (1983). As I explained in Chapter One, Foucault was concerned (as I am here) with the *logic* or *rationale* of certain concepts and implications for the possible (i.e., available) ways in which one could think about associated (local) practices. Geertz, in his own way, was also preoccupied with studying the logic (i.e., meaning) underlying highly localized social concepts and practices, ethnographically. These theoretical ideas are thus well-suited to the present study of participation in education and development, whose meaning can and does vary with context—with varying implications. The conversations that I had with the APEAE president and vice-president, for example, supported the idea that financial means and status were necessary for participation in development to happen. Every instance in which someone stepped forward to cover a project on the community’s behalf therefore served to reinforce the idea that this kind of participation was necessary, desirable, logical. I argue that this conception of participation thus tended to

exclude other ways of thinking about participatory development—including the egalitarian conception described in policy documents. My purpose in the present chapter is to use the theoretical ideas of Foucault and Geertz as tools to examine local dialogue and activity (i.e., discourse) to deepen understanding of the desires, logics, and so forth of local participation. However, I use these tools to show that certain ways of thinking about participation exist, with certain implications for practice—but not to *prove* unequivocally that participatory development practice actually does (or will) take place within Medina Primary as portrayed in local dialogue and activity.

Geertz (1983) emphasized examining an individual context for its own meanings. These meanings, he said, are specific to the particular circumstances of the context of research. Because of these ideas I hesitate using general concepts such as reciprocity, investment, and so forth to avoid glossing over more detailed shades of meaning that are highly particular and localized. It is important in ethnographic work to avoid projecting concepts and meanings from a given (cultural) context onto the one under study (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995). Combining the ideas of Geertz and Foucault, then, I have attempted throughout the ethnographic portion of the study to treat meaning as particular to context while avoiding these kinds of projections of meaning and, worse, the impression that any of these findings can be generalized to other contexts. (Generalizing within a given context, however, is another matter.)¹

¹ Geertz (1973) says that one can generalize findings *within* a given anthropological study—but not directly from one cultural context to another. See also Erickson (e.g., 1986), who emphasizes the importance of contextualizing meaning (i.e., its interpretation) and the limitations of generalizing qualitative research from one context to another. Both authors

As I said in Chapter One, concepts such as responsibility and accountability have been taken for granted, generalized in much of the policy literature on participation in development. Many studies thus concern themselves primarily with determining whether, for example, classrooms have become more equal places; or whether the idea of fostering ownership of local schools through increased community participation holds up, conceptually or theoretically. Lacking in the literature is a detailed study of what meanings people have associated with a thing like participation. What I am attempting to do in the present study is to highlight, contrast and compare the specific meanings of participation that are particular to their individual contexts. The bulk of my findings in the present chapter are from ethnographic field notes—particular to the Medina Primary School community, the period of study, and generalized to dialogue and activity there (where appropriate) from what I have observed elsewhere in Peul culture in the Fuuta Jaloo region.

Participation

I have organized this examination of the multiple meanings of participation in progress in Mafou into two threads. First thread is the *obligation* to participate in family and social life. There was a parent's (and especially a father's) obligation to raise and educate a child; and the reciprocal obligation of adult children to care for their parents, which I described earlier in the chapter. Then there were the general obligations that people had to one another, both social

indicate that qualitative research findings are most useful in *informing* work in another context, not as a way of discerning meaning broadly—as if, to paraphrase Geertz, one could take meanings examined in a single village as representative of the inner workings of an entire society.

and material. For example, neighbors were expected to visit one another whenever there was an illness in a local family. People born and raised in the *quartier* were also expected to participate in community life by attending baptismal ceremonies, funerals, and other social events. Even those who were living elsewhere during these events were obligated to catch up during their next visit to their home communities. (As a Peace Corps Volunteer, neighbors made a point of reminding me of births, deaths, and marriages that had occurred in local families during my absence from the village community where I lived.) This kind of participation has meant everything from stopping by a neighbor's house to say hello, such as during a family visit, to contributing money to cover the salary of a part-time teacher. These acts were all part of the tacit obligation in Peul society to *acknowledge* one another—to show recognition of the problems, needs, experiences, and so forth of others living in one's community.

The second thread of participation that I want to discuss is *status*. This thread has to do with the ambiguous rural-urban status of Mafou Quartier and the perceived associations with a lack of local progress. I discussed these ideas of status in Chapter Five. Dirt roads, no electricity, and a limited supply of clean water all meant that the *quartier* was *rural*; this was how local people described where they lived. They were poor, they said, especially in comparison to neighboring localities both inside and outside of the urban area of Satimbé. However, status had another dimension within the local context. According to how local officials described community development, effective participation meant having access: being connected to people and resources in the city

center, including non-governmental organizations, state agencies, and private-sector businesses. Within local discourse, this kind of status was supposed to provide the Medina Primary School community with the resources necessary to its ongoing development. Local people cited neighboring communities as examples of this kind of status and progress.

As local officials described the lack of progress in Mafou, and their visions of their own health care center and marketplace, one could not help but compare Mafou to neighboring communities. One district-level APEAE official, based in Satimbé, regularly portrayed residents of the *quartier* as poor, as lacking the money and other resources that the city had to offer (e.g., personal communication, November 30, 2004). A sense of uncertainty and faith, an aspect of local discourse that I return to in Chapter Seven, surrounded these two threads of obligation and status. Participation had become a matter of education (i.e., schooling), but also of supporting one's neighbor/community as any good, faithful Muslim should do. This section examines the concepts of obligation, rural-urban status, and religious belief in relation to local participation in development.

Status, progress, and indicators of participation

Hobbhé Quartier² was located to the north of Mafou, nearer to Satimbé center. The *quartier* had a mosque, a mattress manufacturing facility, and a well-equipped truck garage where the largest vehicles in the country were repaired. The principal of Medina Primary School and others employed in the public sector lived in Hobbhé. His son attended school in Hobbhé, which had benefited from a newly constructed elementary school, built and staffed by the father's family,

² Hobbhé and the other place names used in the present study are pseudonyms.

friends, and other residents of the *quartier*. Still farther north, Alarba Quartier featured several mosques, either under construction or newly completed; small shops, restaurants, and hotels were located there as well, border the national highway that led into Satimbé. People employed in the public sector lived there as well, and also business leaders—one of whom had built several private elementary and high schools in the region. Even Tolé-Tolé, a small rural district to the south of Mafou, had built a private junior high school—in addition to the local public elementary school, which itself was equipped with six fully-functioning classrooms. For the people of Mafou, signs of progress and resources were all around them. These signs of progress/status sparked debate among members of the site selection team over what it meant to participate successfully in education.

A school district representative in Satimbé (and member of the site selection team) cited Tolé-Tolé as an example of a community with what he called, in French, *l'engouement* [keen interest] for children's schooling (personal communication, November 27, 2004). He said that Tolé-Tolé was the only case that he knew of where a private school had been built outside of the urban area of Satimbé. He held this example up as evidence of the strength of local participation—of the successfulness of local involvement in children's education, and as a kind of criterion (or indicator) of successful community participation.³ In

³ Two other members of the delegation for the first site visit to Medina Primary School, one from the Satimbé APEAE board and the other from the district APEAE board, argued about this point on our return trip to Satimbé. The former said that Tolé-Tolé was able to get a private school built only because there were people of *means* living there, with access to financial resources necessary to local development. In contrast, he said, the people of Mafou Quartier were all poor. The district APEAE board representative, who supported the selection of Tolé-Tolé as a research

this perspective, the local participant needed to have a strong interest in schooling, the desire to contribute to its improvement, and the willingness to take action on her own initiative. Still, another member of the site selection team (a district-level APEAE official from Satimbé) pointed out that the kind of school improvement that Tolé-Tolé had achieved took *money*. The only reason that Tolé-Tolé had been able to achieve what they had, he said, is because residents there had access to the kind of wealth that the people of Mafou lacked (personal communication, November 24, 2004). For him, the level of enthusiasm for children's schooling that he said was displayed by the people of Mafou, and the strong desire to improve the quality of education there, were more valid indicators of good or successful participation—and more importantly, of the successful school community. This was especially true, he said, of a community as *poor* as Mafou.

People living in Mafou Quartier were mostly poor farmers and trades people, which for the APEAE president and other local officials explained the lack of local progress. Just as the PRSP describes the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment in Guinea as proof of the historical lack of popular involvement in the development process in the country, the APEAE president said that there had been no local progress in Mafou because there were no established relationships between the *quartier* and the city center. The kind of access to resources, such as he said existed in Tolé-Tolé, Hobbhé, and other localities was sorely lacking in Mafou. However, unlike the PRSP, the particular

site, questioned the validity of this statement. Regardless, money was obviously necessary to the construction of schools, classrooms, and the ongoing development of local infrastructures.

kind of participation that Mafou lacked meant something other than the egalitarian enterprise portrayed in the documents that I examined in the present study—in which all citizens, all people, were to participate in order for development to succeed. For people in Mafou, participation did not mean involving everyone in the development process. Rather, it meant raising the community's current status as rural, underdeveloped through improved access to development resources.

To realize any kind of progress, the APEAE president told me, Mafou needed access to material resources. Improving the local road, building new classrooms, and establishing a new health center would require cement, lumber, and equipment—all of which were available in Satimbé, he said. Local people were cast in local discourse as poor, however; they had no money of their own to invest in local development projects (personal communication, December 13, 2007). This is exactly how one member of the site selection team had portrayed the people of Mafou (personal communication, November 30, 2007). Further, local people were described as largely unschooled and unemployed, which for the APEAE president explained the visible lack of progress throughout the *quartier*. The *quartier* was underdeveloped, he said, because local people had been unable to facilitate access to these resources. From his perspective, local progress was an *intellectual* matter, one that could be resolved only through formal schooling and acquiring a post of employment—and the *status* that came with such a post—within the public sector in the city center (personal communication, December 13, 2004). For the APEAE president, schooling

therefore had a particular value for the ongoing development of the local community, but only if these conditions of participation had been met.

The PRSP and other documents that I examined in Chapter Three did not make the kinds of distinctions about the relative value of the participation of one person versus another that I encountered in the Medina Primary School community. In fact, the PRSP portrays these kinds of distinctions—who could/could not be involved in the development process, and so forth—as an *obstacle* to progress. These documents talk about the value of participation as a question of equity, human rights, and the desire for people to represent their own interests in public institutions. In other words, within national/international discourse, all people were supposed to participate in their own development. It was this kind of participation that was supposed to provide, according to policy documents, some measure of equity in local power relations. However, it is important to understand that this valuing of a particular kind of participation did not necessarily mean greater equity of distribution of power. Rather, for local officials in Mafou Quartier, effective participation meant leveraging the involvement of a select group of wealthier, ‘connected’ citizens so that *all* of the residents of the *quartier* might benefit.

At the same time local officials, religious leaders, and residents in Mafou had a vague sense of some future, unforeseeable benefit deriving from their participation in all aspects of social life. Throughout the *quartier* people spoke of the good fortune that would come from aiding and supporting others within the community; and there was also a concomitant fear that refusing to lend such

support to a friend and neighbor in need would bring misfortune.⁴ Such support included attending a baptismal ceremony held by a local family, and pitching in to repair the roof of neighbor's house.⁵ These were the deeds of a good and faithful Muslim, as I said earlier—deeds that would surely reap some future reward for the doer. Likewise, a child's father had a Qu'ranic obligation, as a *parent*, to properly raise and educate⁶ his children. In this perspective, raising and educating a child was part moral obligation to one's family and community, and part philosophical belief in the merits of leading a good and faithful life. This conception of participation differed widely from what I found in the documents I examined in Chapter Three, in which the PRSP portrays citizen responsibility/obligation as a matter of citizenship. Further, the responsibility that parents had for their children's education was not so much a *legal* obligation to provide for their families (i.e., a relationship between citizens and the state), as is the case in the PRSP, but rather a religious and cultural one.

As with their parents, the sons and daughters of Mafou had a similar obligation to support their families (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, their

⁴ This obligation to help and support others only applied if one had the means to do so, and if the need was genuine. For example, everyone who was not sick (and present in the area) was deemed able to attend a neighbor's funeral; providing money or food to someone in need (when asked) was another kind of support. I once heard one of my wealthier informants tell one of his poorer, female neighbors that he would do what he could for her—without actually giving her anything (personal communication, June 17, 2005); this was a common practice, from my past experiences in the Fuuta Jaloo region. The practice was one of the many ways that I saw local people get around social obligations while still maintaining the sense that they were indeed good Muslims, because they had not actually *refused* anything.

⁵ During an interview one local religious leader told me that the community's support for my project would certainly yield some future benefit. He could not say, however, what this benefit would be. A second religious leader in the quartier later told me much the same thing. My interpreter later explained to me the Islamic belief that acts of help and support to others would always be rewarded.

⁶ In this instance, I have separated the acts of *raising* and of *educating* a child. However, people throughout the Medina often talk about these two concepts as one, a point I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

community). This responsibility entailed both sharing the prosperity derived as a result of one's upbringing, and the same Qu'ranic conception of helping others in need. Such responsibility was not so much a matter of common interest (per se) among residents in the quality of education, or anything else that documents on popular participation in national comprehensive development described. Rather, the same sense of duty, faith-power, and the promise of future reward that surrounded any good, Muslim deed extended to children's efforts to support their families and communities. Elders and their children each gave support to their communities out of a mystical sense of some future benefit and moral obligation on the one hand, and a sense of familial and community belonging on the other, in a never ending cycle of *giving* and *making*. In contrast, national/international documents describe participation as a matter of equity, public interest, and one's authority and responsibility as a citizen of the Guinean nation. The role of the parent in a child's education does appear in these documents, especially those produced by PACEEQ. However, participatory development derives its force—as described in the PRSP and similar documents—from the conception of equitable participation of ordinary citizens in their own development.

Giving back

Personal success among people from Mafou was a big piece of the local perspective on the value of education. Growing up, moving away, and eventually reaping the financial rewards of schooling and a good upbringing meant an obligation to *give back* to family and community. Local children were seen as potential contributors to the future progress of the community, largely because of

what they had *received* there—in terms of education, care giving and other support, and so forth. People in Mafou described a child's upbringing, family financial and moral support, religious teaching, formal schooling, and apprenticeship (recalling the case of Ganyankobé) as things that would someday result in a benefit to the community. Simply put, these children's success (or fate) would become the community's success, literally. This depiction of children as future resources for community development had a *philosophical* component and a *moral* one.

Children from Mafou who had succeeded in life—acquiring money, professional status and so forth—had, according to local people, done so as a direct result of whatever the community had provided for them. These children who had *made it* in life were thus bound, as adults, to provide for their parents and others who had helped them to succeed. According to local people, the concomitant obligation that children have had to their home communities did not end when these children left to work in Mali, Senegal, the United States or Ivory Coast—as many local children eventually did. Evidence of this obligation was all around Mafou Quartier, in the form of homes that residents' adult children had had built for their families back home. This obligation, however, was not merely social or familial; it was also spiritual. Each member of Muslim society, which included the people of Mafou Quartier, had a moral obligation to share one's personal fortune with others. This concept of sharing extended through and beyond family/community ties, making the pull to give back even stronger. There was among local residents (and former ones) a sense that giving to others would

bring blessing and good fortune, or at least avoid bad fortune. This sense of benediction deriving from worthy acts permeated local discourse, infused with a moral sense of religious obligation and faith in a power higher than oneself.⁷ These dictates were part and parcel of Qu'ranic texts, and the religious teachings that every child that grew up in Mafou was supposed to follow.

The sense of faith and community that I encountered in Mafou Quartier derived as much from a religious sense of life's unpredictability, or *fate*, as from social duty or obligation. People could not say from one day to the next exactly who would be in need of a neighbor's support; nor could anyone predict how the community might benefit from supporting a child's schooling. Each person knew only that it was her duty, as a Muslim and member of the community, to do so. Local participation in schooling was therefore bound up in a particular kind of social unity. But this was not some unity of reciprocity, in which community members provided equal support to one another. Rather, social unity here derived from the possibility that one might need the same kind of support tomorrow that one's neighbor needed today. Your child may be sick today; but my child might be sick tomorrow.⁸ In this sense, progress was a matter of one's

⁷ It suffices to say that local actions and conversation were imbued with this sense of faith in forces greater than oneself, and a concomitant sense of obligation to others that exists within Muslim societies. People spoke most often in terms of what they and others must or must not do, rather than about religion—at least not directly.

⁸ Maclure (1994) says that participation in African societies is marked by *reciprocity*, in which members of a community, family, or some other group derive mutual benefit or advantage from providing support to one another. I argue that this conception of participation is exceedingly narrow and does not address the variety of people's modes of engagement in social life. In any case, simple reciprocity does not describe the meaning of participation among the people of Mafou, nor does it quite match the rationale given by local people for their participation in children's education. That is, it does not necessarily follow that people in Mafou supported one another out of some common understanding of mutual benefit, but rather out of uncertainty—as if to say, it could just as easily have been *me* who needed the help of my friends and neighbors as anyone else.

obligation to others within a world where life's unpredictability meant that people needed to stick together in order to survive.

A philosophy of good faith and return

Philosophically, whatever a child derived from family and community in terms of education in the broadest possible sense was destined to come back to them as some tangible benefit. A child was, according to local people, in the care of family, neighbors, teachers (e.g., religious), and other members of the community. Both of the religious leaders I interviewed described this same idea. At the end of an interview with the First Imam, he told me that he firmly believed, for example, that the welcoming and support that the people of Mafou had extended to me would come back to the community as a positive benefit. When I asked him what he meant, he just smiled and said that he was convinced of this. He added that he did not know how or when this benefit would come, but he was sure that it would (personal communication, May 7, 2005). According to my interpreter, the Second Imam said much the same thing (personal communication, May 10, 2005). During our first interview, the Second Imam said that he and I had to collaborate “loyally” with one another—staying faithful to our agreement to work together with good and honorable intentions, without “treason.” Anything less, he added, would be displeasing to God and would affect the outcome of our work together (personal communication, May 8, 2005).

The religious leaders I interviewed were associated with the local mosque in Dalla Sector. The First Imam lived in Dalla proper; the second one resided in Balikabé Sector. Both of them were parents of children enrolled in Medina

Primary. The Second Imam's daughter was also one of two recipients of girls' scholarships, awarded by the United States embassy through the PACEEQ project. Both men described religious and other forms of upbringing, or education, as a thing that would somehow be repaid to the community one day. Whether or not a child was able to complete her (sic) studies, and what became of that child—all this was a matter for God to decide. The only certainty was that something would come of it all, of the community's efforts to raise its children. I call this notion of a fated return on children's education the philosophical component of community development because of the vague sense of mystery, faith, and unpredictability that surrounded it.

There was in the local discourse on participation an almost mystical certitude of the dividends that would derive from faith in a higher power. Good deeds would be rewarded, eventually, or so went the prevailing logic of people in Mafou Quartier—though not inevitably or in a way that could be foretold. Imbued though it was with the mystery of a higher power at work, community participation also had a moral component—one that had more to do with the sense of obligation that children had (or rather, *had* to have) to parents and other members of the community that had helped to raise them.

According to the Qu'ran, parents—particularly fathers—had an obligation to educate their children, to look after them, and to provide for them. Religious teachers, neighbors, and other adults shared in this tacit obligation to ensure a child's development into a productive present and future member of the community. In Mafou and elsewhere in the MedinaJallon, adults routinely spoke

to children as any parent would—telling them to listen, to do as they were told, to wait their turn at the local water pump, and to behave themselves at school. This moral component came out of what people I have met throughout Guinea as *les obligations sociales* [social obligations]. These obligations included attending baptisms, funerals, and wedding ceremonies held by members of the local community, co-workers—and of course, members of one's immediate and extended family.

Unity and obligation

The sense of social unity, community, and obligation that I encountered in Mafou extended beyond participation in social events and providing support to one's neighbors. Looking after local children was another expression of this unity and obligation. In a way, anyone and everyone could be called *parent*, to any child. A principal would discipline a child at school by assuming the role of the father;⁹ a woman would invite a neighbor child to eat with her family. People generally did not, in their descriptions and actions, distinguish between their own needs and those of other members of the community—at least not publicly. That is, anyone who had anything—food, clothing, money, good health—was said to have it in large part because of their faith on the one hand, and the vagaries of life on the other. In a word, they were blessed, fortunate. People described bad

⁹ As a Peace Corps volunteer, I once arrived at a neighboring school to find its principal disciplining a student. When I asked other students what was happening, they told me that the boy had repeatedly been late for class. This was disrespectful to the school and to the boy's father. In disciplining the student, the principal had essentially *become* the boy's father, the other students said, and so was punishing the boy for the shame he had brought upon his parents. It is important to note that corporal punishment has been against the law in Guinean schools for over two decades. However, I had witnessed school personnel striking students, as punishment, throughout the country. In one case, a father came to school to punish his son, publicly, himself—in order to shield the school from possible legal or other problems.

fortune in the same way: sickness, poverty, a bad crop, or a child's failure on the national exam could happen to anyone in the community. Two local women explained this sense of shared responsibility, social unity, and life's unpredictability as it played out during the first meeting of parents, teachers, and local officials that I attended in Mafou.

In mid-January, the President of the APEAE, the school principal, and the *Chef du quartier* called a meeting of local parents. We all arrived early one Wednesday morning. The first and Second Imams were there, along with the four *Chefs secteur*, parents, and other members of the local community. There were two purposes to the meeting, according to the APEAE president. One purpose was to introduce me to the local community and to explain the nature of my planned work there.¹⁰ The other purpose was to come up with a solution to a teacher's upcoming, temporary absence.

For a period of several months, the principal told those present at the meeting, one of the four regular classroom teachers at Medina Primary would be absent. The principal recommended hiring a short-term replacement teacher, and said he already had a good candidate for the job. Local officials and parents said that they accepted this proposition; it was only a question of deciding how to pay the new teacher's salary. At first, several parents assembled there suggested dividing the cost of the salary among the parents of the children whose teacher

¹⁰ When I first moved into Mafou in December of 2004 the *Chef du quartier* said he would call a meeting of local people in order to introduce me to the community, so that I could begin my research work. After twice reminding the school principal of the *Chef quartier's* request, the former told me that he was wanting to discuss another topic with parents, anyway. I mention these details only to make clear my own part in the organization of the meeting, the impetus of which was neither wholly a matter of school community affairs, nor wholly about me or my research.

would otherwise be without a teacher. The principal then told the *Chef quartier*, who was sitting next to me and leading the meeting, that he wanted the parents of *all* of the students to split the cost. The principal said (in French), *L'école appartient à toute la communauté*. [The school belongs to the whole community.] This idea echoed how PACEEQ documents, such as on-line success stories, described the school community relationship. The *Chef quartier* then told those assembled that all parents would have to contribute.¹¹ I watched the principal do a few calculations in his notebook, arriving at the sum of 1,500 Guinean Francs (or about 50 cents in U.S. currency) per student that each parent would pay.¹² By a show of hands, the assembled parents indicated that they agreed with this decision and the amount that each of them would pay (personal communication, January 18, 2005).

What was most significant about the meeting was the way in which local people described the decision to collect money from each parent to pay for the replacement teacher. I later asked two local women, who had not attended the

¹¹ From my observations, participation at the meeting was not necessarily equitable or equal. Arguably, the school principal and the *Chef quartier* ran the meeting while the APEAE president walked around, gesturing to people (especially the women) not to leave the meeting, as some people had already done. (As one local woman later told me, everyone in the community has work waiting for them at home (personal communication, January 19, 2005).) The president told everyone at the meeting that they should pay attention, and generally re-iterated whatever the *Chef quartier* said that day. However, I am more concerned in the present study with how people *described* their own participation at the meeting than I am with whether or not participation *appeared* to me to be equitably distributed among the people present. Again, this approach is in keeping with my focus on the possible or available meanings of participation—according to how would-be participants portrayed their own involvement.

¹² Guinean elementary school teachers who had obtained full, permanent status typically earned between 100,000 and 150,000 Guinean Francs (GF). Due to loan repayment obligations to the International Monetary Fund, however, the Guinean government had for more than a decade been hiring teachers mostly under contract, which earned them a monthly salary of about 60,000. Multiplying 1,500 GF by the total enrollment of 171 students yielded a total of 256,500GF. Asking the parents of all school children at Medina Primary to contribute to the salary costs therefore meant that the school could pay the replacement teacher about 64,000 per month for four months—a competitive wage for a contractual, or non-permanent, teacher.

meeting, how it was that all parents had to contribute—not just those whose children were directly affected by the regular teacher’s absence. Everyone had to do so, they said, because *any* of their children could have lost a teacher. As one of the women said, in order to explain this logic, “If may be your child today [who needs a teacher], but it will be mine tomorrow” (personal communication, May 3, 2005). This phrase cast equal participation in local social life in Mafou Quartier as a matter of understanding and accepting both the unpredictability of people’s needs, and the concomitant necessity of relying upon one another within the local community.

Accompanying the apparent randomness of people’s needs was a sense of unity, such that people’s disparate problems became a concern for all members of the community. People of Mafou, for example, were expected to treat another parents’ children more or less as they would their own. This conception of unity was inextricably linked to the complete unpredictability of life. More than mere fatalism, however, this sense of unity-by-happenstance had to do with a strong belief in powers beyond one’s own reckoning and reach on the one hand, and the notion that no one was any different (i.e., better or worse) from anyone else on the other. Future events were not only unpredictable; they often occurred indiscriminately. Anyone could fall sick at any given time; misfortune did not judge.¹³ That one child and not another may need a temporary teacher was something largely beyond people’s control, according to them, but not because

¹³ People did say that certain members of the community were blessed, and that others were cursed—though more rarely in the case of the latter. For example, one of the local imam’s sons got sick and died while on a trip to the capital city. Following the funeral, local people commented on how smart, industrious, well mannered, and thus how blessed the boy had been.

the circumstances were inevitable. Rather, faith dictated that a higher power guided these things—yet not entirely without any possibility of people intervening in order to influence their futures.

It is important to note that the need for a teacher at Medina Primary School was not specific to the children and families of a particular classroom, according to local people and school personnel. However, unlike how participation has been portrayed in the literature and within policy documents, sharing the burden of the temporary teacher's salary was not about collective ownership over local schooling. The idea was not that need or benefit were equally distributed among local people, or that collective, civic action improved schooling as a whole, to everyone's (mutual) benefit. Rather, this arrangement to pay the salary from equal contributions derived instead from the notion that need was indiscriminate and unpredictable. It was as if the idea that the *possibility* of need was equally distributed. To ensure that each member of the community had the support that she would need (now and in the future) for her and her family, *everyone* had to participate in community activities.¹⁴ No one knew who, at any given moment, would need the support of friends and neighbors, or *when*. This conception of community obligation—born of the random unpredictability of necessity—fostered a kind of unity. But this unity was not predicated on any sense of equality of need, though each person described herself as no better or worse than anyone else in the community. No one could be more special, more

¹⁴ I want to make two points here. One, the family often sent a designated person (or people) to attend weddings, baptisms, and other social events on its behalf. Two, not everyone attended all events. For example, people from Dalla did not always attend wedding ceremonies held in Kouliman Sector. Such omissions often fell along ethnic and class lines, but not always. Yet for the most part one could describe the community as participating, whether directly or by proxy.

in need, more deserving, and so on than anyone else. With respect to higher powers and the randomness of people's need for community support, however, each member of the community was equal to every other member. The most that anyone knew, from the poorest inhabitant to the richest, from the least erudite to the *imam* himself, was that people in the community would have needs that they could not fulfill on their own. Rather than try to foretell who, what, or when, local people accepted the arbitrary nature of life and sought to cover one another by responding together in all cases of need. Responding to people in need was the only sure means of honoring one's social obligations as well as the obligation one had to be a good Muslim.

The philosophical component of participation in local affairs was predicated entirely on faith in good deeds done and the promise of some eventual, though unforeseeable, benefit to the community. This was not, however, a simple matter of investment-return. It was instead a question of fulfilling one's social obligations to other members of the community, as part of one's religious commitment. There could be no expectation of any *specific* benefit, only be faith that some benefit would come, eventually.¹⁵ In contrast, the moral component to community development was most definitely associated with a specific set of cultural expectations.

¹⁵ Research subjects that I interviewed told me of an expatriate who, following an extended research visit to a nearby locality, later returned to build a school. The imam and others who I spoke with offered this example as proof that good things came from supporting the activities of someone like me.

Making it

Children raised in the Peul culture of Guinea have historically been expected to take care of their parents later on in life. According to friends and colleagues I have known, there has been no real, functioning retirement plan of any kind, public or private. Instead, people have relied on family members to provide for them. People regularly returned to their villages and towns during religious holidays and paid for food and other preparations; they also left money with their families. For example, a teaching colleague once told me that, despite the abundance of food and access to other daily necessities in his home village, local people considered him to be somehow better off because he was formally *employed*. People working in the urban areas frequently accepted younger siblings from both his and his spouse's families into their homes in the city, so that these children could attend school, have food and clothing provided for them, and so on. I found the same practice most everywhere I worked: colleagues, usually people with government jobs, providing for parents, siblings, and members of their extended families.

Historically, it has been generally understood among people throughout the Fuuta Jaloo that children in their care will one day *give back* to the family by providing for the latter. Parents have expected these kinds of care and support to them and their families in part as recompense for time and effort spent nurturing their children, in part because the children would someday have the *means* to do so. By *parents* I mean adult caregivers, providers such as mothers, fathers, aunts, brothers, and other family members, even friends and neighbors to whom

a child has been entrusted.¹⁶ Giving back has meant children sending home money for food and other essentials, having a new house built for one's family, and sheltering and otherwise providing for the schooling of younger children—such as a wife's younger sibling.¹⁷ However, one had to have made it in order to be able, financially, to give back. It is also important to note that this sense of obligation to one's family and community also embodied Qu'ranic and other moral teachings and the idea that each Muslim should help those less fortunate—i.e., those in need. That these good deeds would someday bring their own rewards was almost a given. The case of one local family presents one of the most visible examples of people from Mafou who have since *made it* and also *given back* to the local community.

Local people described the Tahl family as successful in almost every respect. The family's sons and daughters had all grown up in Mafou Quartier, had moved away to other towns, and had become prosperous through government-backed and privately funded projects. As one local woman (who lived near the Tahl family) described the Tahl children, *Bhe hewtii*. [They have arrived.] (personal communication, May 18, 2005). People in the Fuuta Jallon

¹⁶ I have encountered the same practices among members of virtually every ethnic group and region in Guinea, including Malinké, Sousou, Guerzé, and Kissi. In other words, these practices and conceptions of family obligation were not by any means unique to Peul culture.

¹⁷ *Education* can include initiating an adolescent girl into her future role of wife, caregiver, and housekeeper. A friend of mine who lived in a major metropolitan area of Guinea had accepted into his home a girl from his wife's extended family. The girl in question was not, however, enrolled in school. She instead spent her day performing household chores, such as preparing the evening meal and cleaning, in return for room, board, and healthcare—whatever the surrogate "parents" would provide to any member of their immediate family.

Guinean men, friends often told me, generally preferred to take their wives from the rural areas, since these girls were *bien éduqué* [well-educated]. Well-educated meant that the girls knew how to respect their future husbands, were practiced at taking care of the household and of children—all that was required of a wife. Such was not always the case; some of these girls did attend school, at least for a few years.

commonly used this phrase to describe successful men and women, particularly those who had achieved a certain social and economic status. In this context, then, *bhe hewtii* means, “they have made it.” The same woman was describing to me her misgivings about not having kept her four daughters in school. If she had done so, she said, as the Tahl family had done, perhaps her children would have succeeded as well.

Instead of going to school, the woman’s youngest daughter was learning to dye cloth to sell in the market in Satimbé. This trade would at least provide the girl with some means of income, the woman said. In comparing her children in this way to those of the Tahl family, she was effectively assigning a value to formal schooling. The Tahl widow’s children had sent her to Mecca, a rather expensive pilgrimage that few Guineans can afford, repaired the roof on the house, had a fence built around the family plot, and was providing enough food so that she could feed herself and several family members living with her. The Tahl family was hiring local men to complete these projects, eating meat with their meals—things that ordinarily would cost more than what the cassava, potatoes, and other crops the family had planted could possibly provide. In contrast, her neighbor—the woman I interviewed—said that she herself was relying on members of her own extended family for rice and other foodstuffs and lived in an unfinished, one-room house. Had her own children gone to school, she was saying, she might have benefited from their success, just as the Tahl widow had benefited from the success of her own children.

Beyond providing for their mother, two of the Tahl children had contributed significantly to community development and the local school. One of them had supplied the money needed to buy cement to complete the bridge improvement project, as the APEAE president had told me (personal communication, December 13, 2004). The other offered money to pay the salary of a local teacher, hired as a temporary replacement for one of the regular classroom teachers.¹⁸ Both of these former residents of Mafou had each attended school through the university level and were now working in the public sector. However, the second case of participation in local schooling and development is, for my purposes, the more important of the two cases. However, it is significant not only for what it says about individual success, caring for one's parents, or sharing one's good fortune with others. Rather, the case also says a great deal about how Mafou officials and residents have characterized local capacity to contribute to community development as limited, and dependent upon individual/community *status*.

Paying for everyone

My interpreter and I regularly visited the local mosque in Dalla Sector. People throughout the *quartier* came there for the Friday afternoon prayer, the most sacred of all Islamic prayers. Friday was the day to gather, to meet and greet one another, and to give alms to village elders and religious leaders. People came to announce an upcoming baptismal ceremony or the arrival of a district-level delegation, and to share and hear other local news. People often

¹⁸ This is the case of the same teacher that was a topic of the January 2005 meeting of parents, the APEAE board, and school personnel to I referred earlier in the chapter.

came to the mosque to solicit support, and benedictions as well.¹⁹ On one of these Fridays, near the end of the school year, the school principal came to announce the need for contributions to pay the salary of the temporary teacher at the school. One of the two Tahl sons, who had come home to visit his family, offered to cover the entire four months' salary of over 200,000 Guinean Francs (more than 60 U.S. dollars). I later learned that his offering would effectively replace the community's initial agreement to pay the teacher's salary through parents' contributions. At least one local official told me that this practice of one community member of means covering the entire community was quite common.

According to the Vice-president of the APEAE board, the community could always count on some local person to pay the costs of local projects or debts. She described one situation in which a local man came forward to pay the sum that the community was supposed to send to the district government to support some unspecified activity. There was always someone in the *quartier* that was willing to do this, she said, in order to maintain the school community's reputation as responsive and cooperative in the eyes of district officials.²⁰ The same was true of any local projects that needed financing, such as the community's contribution to the costs of repairing the school roof.²¹ For her, the principal, and

¹⁹ A benediction in this sense is a prayer of blessing, particularly to protect one from evil or harm, or to bring good fortune. People in Mafou regularly came to the mosque to receive benedictions from the local imam and religious elders, to which they brought alms of money, food, and so forth. However, it is important to note that local people would never openly portray the alms as offered in exchange for any gain—although a blessing to this effect from the mosque would surely follow.

²⁰ I will say more about the reputation that the people of Mafou had cultivated, according to local officials, in the next chapter.

²¹ PACEEQ's predecessor had, during the project's pilot phase, employed a model that combined community and project contributions toward local school construction activities. This project devised this model in order to encourage local people to participate in education while instilling in

other local officials, supporting school and community development meant soliciting aid from a wealthy resident (or former resident). Paradoxically, the existence of these local benefactors cast effective, *collective* participation in Mafou Quartier as improbable or doubtful. Participation was portrayed as a financial enterprise, one that required access to resources in much the same way that the APEAE board president had earlier described local capacity for participation and progress.²²

Two aspects of communication at the local mosque are important to understanding the effects that the practice of paying for everyone had in relation to community participation. One was the tacit anonymity surrounding what was said and done at the mosque. The other was the *legitimacy* that the mosque, as a public venue of religious importance, lent to transactions that took place there.

Following the Friday afternoon prayer that day people who gathered at the Dalla Mosque withdrew either to the gravel courtyard outside or to the smaller of two buildings, in order to listen to the week's announcements. Whereas the larger building and courtyard were for everyone's use,²³ only men of high social/economic standing were allowed to join the group of the imam and village

them a sense of responsibility and ownership. The model aimed to develop the community's knowledge and skills in project supervision and fiscal management, among other things.

²² Encouraging local communities to seek assistance from people of means was part of the PACEEQ model since the project's inception, though according to the APEAE vice-president, this practice pre-dated the project's arrival in the Medina Primary School community. I once attended a meeting that the project held during my Peace Corps service, in which business leaders and people employed in the public sector had organized to promote schooling in their native communities. Soliciting help from people of means and influence, living inside or outside of the local area, was common in PACEEQ project sites such as Mafou Quartier. However, I am not as interested in the origins of these practices as I am in what these practices say about participation in schooling and development within the Medina Primary School community.

²³ Only men were allowed to pray together in these three places. Women prayed in an annex to the smaller building, or just behind it—separated from the men.

elders within the smaller, original mosque building for the prayer and weekly announcements. On this particular Friday, the group included the *Chef quartier*, one of the Tahl brothers, and my interpreter. The *saali*, who performed the call to prayer,²⁴ sat in the doorway of the smaller building to relay announcements made by the imam and others inside to the people seated in the courtyard. But rather than transmit the benefactor's identity, the *saali* communicated only that someone had made a contribution to cover the temporary teachers' salary. The people inside the mosque thus remained ostensibly anonymous. No one had publicly associated any names with the transaction. Still, this was a public forum, nonetheless, which lent authority and legitimacy to the act. The person offering had made a commitment, which meant a public obligation to pay; he was also assured that the money would get to the teacher. Everyone witnessed what had taken place, yet without any names being mentioned. As my interpreter later explained to me, people in the Fuuta Jallo often went to the mosque for these reasons: *anonymity* and *legitimacy*. In the case of the contribution of money for the teacher's salary, no one had to worry about trusting anyone; the authority and discretion of the mosque had taken care of everything (personal communication, April 22, 2005).²⁵

²⁴ In smaller villages in Guinea and other countries, the *saali* stands outside the mosque (or within one of its turrets) and literally calls people to come and pray for each of the five daily prayers of Islam. Some mosques, especially the larger ones, use a public address system to broadcast a pre-recorded call.

²⁵ In the Fuuta Jaloo, and elsewhere in Guinea, if a person had not witnessed an event directly, then she could not (and would not) attest to it—at least not definitively. Saying that a man had stolen something from a local home was not possible unless one had actually *seen* the robbery take place. While innuendo and suspicion were possible, no Peul would claim (not publicly, anyway) anything that she had not observed. So while people within the mosque had seen the principal ask for a contribution and the Tahl son offer to make it, and others outside might have

The events of that Friday at the mosque speak to the sense of benediction and benefit that bound together participation in local social life. On the one hand, the principal going to the mosque to ask for help in paying the teacher's salary showed the problem to be one of benediction. The school needed funds; anyone offering to provide the money would have the blessing and sanction of the mosque, as the holiest, most authoritative of institutions. On the other, the act of giving had the effect of preserving the giver's anonymity while providing some assurance that the money would be spent as intended. At the same time, the solicitation placed doubt upon equal participation, community responsibility, and ownership; the offer of money at the mosque had solidified this doubt, made it real. Sharing the burden of the teacher's salary among members of the local community was just not possible, or at least not reliable. Still, as the principal later told me, some parents had paid all or part of their agreed-upon contributions. Now that someone had come forward to take care of the entire sum, those who had already paid would get their money back, he said (personal communication, May 3, 2005). Local, equal participation (i.e., ownership or collective authority/responsibility) was rendered null, unnecessary, and meaningless. What had once been a collective act of participation, an equitable sharing of responsibility for a child's upbringing among local parents, was now an act of nameless benediction. Viable, effective participation depended more upon things like influence, schooling, means, status, and the intervention of a higher

known or later learned what had happened, no one located inside or outside of the mosque that day would have dared to communicate this information too widely.

power than it did upon the organized intervention of ordinary citizens in local schooling and development.

Making it in Ganyankobé

Making it as a native of Mafou Quartier did not necessarily require formal schooling; people of other backgrounds had also succeeded in life, according to local people. Ganyankobé had produced a number of successful masons who had returned to the community to build homes for their parents; local masons had built the village mosque. People living elsewhere in Mafou had developed their own, profitable concerns: pharmacies, auto repair shops, metal forges, and other businesses. These were largely uneducated people in that they had not finished school; most had not completed elementary school, if they had gone to school at all. These sons (mostly) and daughters of local people worked in Satimbé; others lived and worked in the capital city of Conakry. Some of them had even moved as far away as Bamako (Mali), Dakar (Senegal), or Abidjan (Ivory Coast). With very few exceptions, each of them had either returned to give back to their parents by putting up a new house, paying medical bills, or sent money home to Mafou in order to cover these and other of the family's needs.

The ability to return to the village to build a home for one's parents was, for Guineans, a true mark of personal success. For example, the son of one local woman had come back to Mafou for his older brother's funeral, staying nearly two months to oversee construction of a new, three-bedroom home for his mother; the son of one of her neighbors had built a house for his mother and their extended family, and was beginning construction on a second house. This

second man had a general food store in the capital and, regularly sent money to the family in Mafou, according to his late brother's wife (personal communication, May 13, 2005). The son of yet another local family owned an electronics store. Local people had come to expect these former residents of the community to return and build homes for themselves and their parents.²⁶ These native sons had the financial means and a concomitant obligation to return to Mafou and give back some of what they had gained as a result of their upbringing. Yet current residents of Ganyankobé had told me that apprenticing in the building trades was, for them, no longer a viable option for educating their children and ensuring the continued progress of the village. This reluctant conclusion echoes what the APEAE president and other local officials said of schooling and development: the latter could not happen without the former.

By defining participation and what was required in order to achieve some measure of progress, local residents and officials had described the characteristics of the ideal participant. Local development not only required connections, materials, money, religious faith, and so forth; it also required a particular kind of person for development to *happen*. According to local officials, only a particular kind of person—one who had acquired the means and was willing to share it with family *and* community—could possibly bridge the gap

²⁶ Most families in Mafou and elsewhere in the Fuuta Jallo region had *land*. The family plot was typically divided among the male children, who, one expected, would return someday to build a home there. This was a source of pride, guilt, and consternation, according to Peuls that I knew. During my Peace Corps service, for example, the older brother of a friend would regularly ask me to tell the latter to come home and put up a house on property that belonged to the family. This kind of move ensured that there would always be someone occupying the family plot, thereby ensuring the family's posterity.

between what local people had and what they aspired to have. I call this person the ideal participant.

The ideal participant

According to local people and officials in Mafou, the ideal participant was someone who had made it. Personal, financial success was a key to participation in local development; so was acquiring a certain status and influence with the right resources. The local bridge was not going to magically build itself—materials and equipment were needed to improve it and the road. According to how local people and officials described the role of the well-place person in development, local people needed a Mafou native who could use his connections in Satimbé with suppliers and others in order to provide these resources. This person was not only someone who was financially and socially successful; he also had to be *schooled*. At one time, education meant all forms of upbringing, apprenticeship, and schooling, which were still part of the mix. Yet in the instance of the Tahl sons contributing to local development, both men had attended school through university and now worked in the public sector.

According to their actions, the two Tahl brothers had the capacity and the willingness to contribute to local development in Mafou Quartier. What these two men lacked, however, were connections to area resources and a willingness to facilitate local progress on more than a piecemeal basis—as has historically been the case in the *quartier*. To hear the APEAE president and Vice-president talk about the lack of formal schooling among local people, this ideal participant in development did not exist in Mafou Quartier. However, not just any schooled

person would do. What the community needed, and did not have, was a real *intellectual* among them—someone who could bring knowledge, contacts, and an understanding of the importance of things like schooling to the support of local development projects. This particular kind of intellectual had to be working in the public sector.

Connections

I want to go back now to my first encounter with the president of the local APEAE board. I was just returning from a trip to visit the local schoolteachers, all of whom lived outside of Mafou Quartier—though within walking distance of Medina Primary School. As we greeted each other, he told me that he was sorry not to have been out to visit me since I had moved into the community. He was busy planting potatoes, he said. After a few seconds of silence, he began talking about people in the *quartier*. The problem with local development, he explained, was that there were *beaucoup d'ouvriers* [a lot of trades people] living in the area, and only that. These were largely unskilled people who worked more or less for themselves, he said. *Menuisiers, tailleurs, macons*," he told me. [Carpenters, tailors, masons.] All were working here in the *quartier*, not in town, he added. That is, no one from the immediate geographic area was *employed* outside of the *quartier* in any professional capacity. *Pas de fonctionnaires dans tout le quartier*, he said. [No *functionaries* in the whole neighborhood.] *Pas d'intellectuels*. [No intellectuals.] Who did he mean by *intellectuels*? I asked. *Des fonctionnaires*, he responded. [Fonctionaries] (personal communication, December 13, 2004).

The APEAE president told me that only *functionaries*—formally educated people who were employed in the public sector²⁷—could provide access to resources such as equipment and materials needed for construction and other local development projects. He then nodded toward the road bridge across the river that ran through the *quartier*, from one side to the other. The bridge, he said, was built using local labor to haul rock and sand (available locally), and cement (purchased in Satimbé). A man from the community had contributed the funds needed to complete the project. (I later learned that the same local man worked in the capital city on national construction projects for the state government—one of the Tahl brothers) What the community had lacked at the time, however, were connections in the city center in order to gain access to not only building materials but also the automated equipment that would have facilitated construction of the bridge. This was the *intellectuel*²⁸ to which the president was

²⁷ The French word *fonctionnaire* [functionary] refers to someone working in the public sector, especially or usually for the government. In Guinea, and particularly as the APEAE president used the term, a functionary was typically someone who had completed formal schooling through university. This person had obtained a baccalaureate degree to serve in a specific (public) sector and capacity, such as a local treasurer for the national government or an agricultural extension agent—who held some *authority* in that capacity. For example, my friends and colleagues who have worked in the forestry service for some years have been responsible for sensitizing the public to the importance of preserving the natural environment, enforcing laws designed to regulate and protect national forest land, and other duties.

²⁸ I purposely use the French spelling here, since this is how the word was employed in local conversation. Yet a couple of Pular terms are roughly equivalent. One is *gando*, meaning, literally, *intellectuel* or “one who has experience,” or, “a well read person.” Another is *hewtugol*, meaning, “to arrive.” However, conjugated in the past tense (as *hewtii*) the word refers to someone who has “gotten it,” or “understood,” as in having figured out the solution to a complex problem. *Hewtii* can also refer to someone who has attained a certain level of intelligence, competency, authority, clout or *success* (as in the case of the Tahl brothers that I presented earlier in the chapter). Examples include a student who has passed an important exam, or a person who has been named to an important or influential post with the government. This is how the term was used in local discourse during the study: to refer to someone who had “made it,” someone who had attained a certain level of authority, power and influence, income, and so on—i.e., *status*. Although a near-equivalent (more or less) term exists in English, I have chosen to use the French term *intellectuel* here because the word has been adopted directly into the Pular language.

referring—the functionary, someone who could facilitate contact between the local community and the resources necessary to development (personal communication, December 13, 2004).

What I found most remarkable about this first one-on-one conversation with the president was the link he made between the *intellectuel* and the *fonctionnaire*. Intellectuals were people who had attended school, spoke the official language of French, were well read, and so on. Functionaries in Guinea were *professionals* (as opposed to trades people), people who had acquired their jobs through a combination of experience, schooling, and connections of their own. (As a teacher and teacher trainer, colleagues of mine had gotten their positions via family members and friends with influence in public sector institutions. The practice was as widespread as any I had encountered in all my years of working in the country.)

The functionary's work in Guinea was mental work, not manual labor. More importantly, the work was regular and steady. Aside from perhaps the relatively few people working for private sector enterprises in manufacturing or distribution, or the few donor agencies, non-governmental organizations, and various missions of foreign governments, functionaries were by far the most stably employed people in the entire country. Functionaries may not have been rich, but at least they had a steady paycheck from one month to the next. This was a tremendous benefit to their families, who could count on rent being paid, food on the table, and maybe even something left over for trips to visit family and other social obligations. Functionaries certainly made up the largest segment of

the working population in Guinea. These were generally learned, respected people.

Most important of all, perhaps, was the president's statement about the *fonctionnaire* in relation to local development. Local development, he said, or progress, had not come to Mafou Quartier for one simple reason. There were no *intellectuels* to facilitate development projects, specifically building projects. These were the primary markers of progress: a new health care center, a fully functioning school, or a weekly open-air market—as I described in the preceding chapter. Local people drew upon these markers to assess the state of progress in Mafou, and always did so in comparison with other, neighboring communities and the level of infrastructure found in the city center.

Progress had not found its way to the *quartier*, the president of the APEAE board said, because there were no *intellectuels* living in the community. Local intellectuals could connect local inhabitants with sources of equipment, tools, materials, even government officials, whose approval was needed in order for the community to go forward with most any project of this kind. Schools and health care centers could not be built without district authority behind them; the national government, which decided all post assignments for its functionaries, would not assign teachers, nurses, and other staff without this authority. Yet what was significant about the dependence of local development upon the functionary/intellectual was the fact that the *quartier* lacked exactly that. It was as if the president was explaining, or justifying, what he described as a lack of community development. There had been no *real* development, in terms of

equipment and other modern resources, he said, because there was no one who could facilitate the kind of progress that for local people seemed to separate them from the residents of neighboring communities—especially those living in the city center.

Summary and conclusion

According to local people, Mafou Quartier needed residents who had made it themselves in order for the whole community to make progress. The community needed people who had grown up there, who had since become successful (financially, socially) in their own right. These native sons had to then come back and contribute to local development. This perspective is not unusual, and as I said has become an integral component of the PACEEQ approach, according to documents produced by USAID (e.g., 2003a). Alternatively, the community needed to raise its own future contributors, as in the case of Ganyankobé, by changing from an apprenticeship model of education to that of formal schooling. This perspective also embodied a sense of self-reliance. Self-reliance derived from a sense of isolation and fear of relying upon anyone outside of the village—isolation that stemmed from what residents there described as its unique history and origins. This meaning was clear from the examination of local discourse that I did in Chapter Five.

According to local officials in Mafou, there was no one actually living in the *quartier* who was schooled, an *intellectual*. Schooling was needed not only to ensure one's capacity to facilitate the *quartier's* development; it was also necessary that one be schooled in order to be *willing* to help, especially

according to the APEAE president. From statements that both he and the vice-president made, and from my own observations, there was a sense that one had to be *schooled* in order to understand the significance of schooling—and, by extension, of local development. Willingness also required that a person be disposed to supporting the community, which meant having a strong sense of unity with other members. In contrast to what I said earlier about locally shared obligations to others, people from Mafou did not always share what they had with those outside of their own families. However, I cannot say that this lack of support for non-family-related projects was related to people's level of schooling—only that local officials attributed one to the other. Local officials portrayed the *quartier's* inhabitants as lacking in understanding of the need for collaboration and participation in local projects to improve the state of schooling and/or other infrastructure.

A number of people were building new homes in Mafou Quartier at the time of the study. Whereas this was a time of economic hardship in Guinea,²⁹ they obviously had money, somewhere. In four cases—three in Dalla, one in Balikabé—those who had built the houses were businesspeople who had established themselves in Satimbé, Conakry, and Abidjan. The owner/builder of one home had attended some schooling; two others lived in Conakry and spoke French; and the fourth could communicate well enough in French to transact

²⁹ A year earlier, the Guinean government deregulated its currency. Since then, the price of everything from gasoline to food had risen dramatically. A fifty-kilogram sack of rice, once about 22,000GF, now cost between 90,000 and 110,000. The price of fuel had gone from 1,500GF per gallon to over 3,000GF. The school principal told me one day that he had had to park his motorcycle, his only means of transportation, at home in favor of a bicycle. Like many other functionaries, he was also resorting to planting peanuts, rice, or other crops to supplement his regular government salary.

business in the city. At least one of them was well versed in Arabic, who was in fact teaching at a private, French-Arabic school in the capital. So while the people in these four cases were not uneducated or illiterate, they did not have the level of formal schooling that the Tahl brothers had, nor did they fit the profile of government functionary like the Tahl's did. Still, if people from the community had the financial means to help out with local development, why had they kept to themselves?

A few weeks before leaving Mafou, I asked the APEAE president how it was that a *quartier* where fine homes were being built had not gotten together the resources needed for new classroom construction. *L'egoism*, he said.

[Selfishness] (personal communication, July 20, 2005). He told me that an authentic sense of unity was lacking in the *quartier*, a kind of selfishness that kept residents from sharing/contributing to local schooling and development—despite how research subjects had described the relative unity among local people. (This was the same sense of unity that the vice-president had claimed to be always present, which I noted in the previous chapter.) Mafou was a rural, poor community, which some former residents had somehow overcome. However, the community itself had been unable to attain the urban, (i.e., developed) status of the places where these *made its* often lived.

To continue to be called urban, Mafou Quartier had to *look* the part. It had to achieve progress by developing at least some comparable level of infrastructure with what local officials identified as features of urban life: a fully functioning, six-classroom school; an open air market; a health care center; and

so on. Otherwise, progress of the kind envisioned by the APEAE president would not carry with it the imperative urgency and certitude present in his remarks, and in those made by other local officials. Had Mafou been classified as a genuine rural district, in character *and* official status, the community could exist without further development; the tendency to compare its progress to that of neighboring localities would not have been so strong. The justification for constructing a complete elementary school of six classrooms did not exist for so-called rural localities such as those situated outside of Satimbé. Mafou Quartier was, according to local officials, therefore underdeveloped. The *quartier* therefore needed a particular kind of person—someone of status and a particular sensibility, who would be predisposed toward helping develop the community—in order to improve the state of local infrastructure and achieve some progress.

The elements I have discussed in the present chapter tended to limit the possibilities of what could/could not be done (or at least imagined), in terms of local capacity to participate in Mafou's development. According to how residents and officials of the *quartier* described the situation there, local development was thus a *possibility*, but not necessarily a *probability*. Progress depended upon a level of schooling that did not exist in the community at the time of the study. Further, the community was pervasively and almost inescapably rural. This image served to reinforce the notion that no one in the *quartier* had the qualities that local development, in keeping with Mafou's notion of itself as a developed (i.e., *urban*) locality. The absence of local development stood as a constant reminder of people's incapacity to improve things where they lived; the nearly

fixed image of the *rural*, underdeveloped community had made successful participation nearly fixed property of the community. This image thus made development *now*, with the available people/resources, difficult (if not impossible) to achieve.



Chapter Seven: Participation, Truancy, and Shifting Accountability

Introduction

The Medina Primary School community's image of itself, as successful or otherwise, was portrayed within local discourse as dependent upon the chances of success of a predominantly female sixth-grade class¹ at the upcoming year-end national exams. It was April. An act of truancy on the part of a majority of these students just two months prior to the exams was the justification offered by the school principal and the APEAE board president to call a meeting of parents to discuss the incident. These students were called the *saliibhe*—meaning, literally, “those who refused”² (personal communication, April 18, 2005) to come to school. Field notes from this meeting, and subsequent interviews with meeting attendees (and some non-attendees), describe a sense of doubt that the exam candidates would succeed. As noted during the meeting, failure come exam time would mean a loss of face with donor agencies, such as PACEEQ, bringing shame to the school community. Further, the failure of students at the national exam would expose a glaring inadequacy, whose specter was constantly

¹ In a later interview with the school principal, he told me that a number of students in both fifth and sixth grade had been absent without explanation on that same Wednesday afternoon. However, given the limitations of time and resources, and my decision to focus primarily on the sixth-grade students and their ‘parents,’ I decided not to recruit any fifth-grade parents for the study. By parents, I mean the students’ primary caregivers, a point to which I return later on in the chapter.

² Throughout the text, I have provided the translations from Pular/Fulfulde into English language. Native speakers assisted with some translations, particularly excerpts of interview transcripts. Linguists trained in Pular translation and native to the Pular/Fulfulde of the region under study translated the original Pular transcriptions into French. I have used both the original transcriptions and subsequent translations as a guide in providing my own translations from Pular to English rather than from the French translations into English, citing key words in their original Pular where needed.

present: the lack of adequate classroom space to serve the needs of all school age children living in the community.

I argue that, for local people, the possible failure of sixth-grade students on the national exam threatened the school community's image of itself as *worthy* of future investment of time, money and other resources by district-level officials and potential donors—such as PACEEQ. This image was especially fragile, however, in light of the findings that I presented in Chapters Five and Six. For local officials in particular, Mafou Quartier's tenuous rural-urban status—as underdeveloped, as nearly cutoff from the resources necessary to progress, and as lacking in the kind of participation needed for community development meant that the school community could ill afford the kind of wholesale failure that the truancy seemed for them to foreshadow.³ The lack of classroom space at the school seemed to further deepen this threat, given the level of fear that was present within meeting dialogue and activity.

The national/international reform goal of universal access to education could not be met unless the Medina Primary School community could secure classroom space sufficient to teach children at all six grade levels in the elementary school cycle. It is important to note, however, that the goals of international education reform were not the only ones in play within local discourse. The school's ability/inability to meet children's educational needs had other meanings, which co-existed—and possibly superseded—whatever the national/international discourse on access, or reform success, had to say about

³ I would like to thank Jeff Riedinger of Michigan State University for helping me to clarify this idea.

the latter. I examine in the present chapter ethnographic field notes and interview data collected in connection with what I will call the *saliibhe* meeting, in which members of the three key research subject groups—parents, teachers and school board members—met to discuss the truancy incident. My purpose is to highlight the meeting, the surrounding events, and implications for what participation and success in education reform had come to mean within local discourse. Unlike what I found in the documents that I examined in Chapters Three and Four, in which participation had come to signify an *improvement* over past efforts at development and education reform in particular, participation had come to mean something else within the local context. Participation, according to how local people portrayed the concept, meant preventing the potential loss of face with donors and others that failure at the exam threatened to bring. For local people, this kind of failure therefore threatened what little clout with the district and potential donors that the Medina Primary School community felt it had—clout that local officials in particular felt that they needed in order to realize any form of progress.

I have divided the present chapter into three parts. First, I describe the *saliibhe* meeting and site: who attended, what was discussed, and how, as well as the sequence of events leading to the meeting's organization. Second, I describe the series of interviews I conducted with some of the people connected to the meeting, including the set of criteria I followed in selecting interviewees. Interviewees included parents of the *saliibhe* students, teachers, the school principal, and members of the APEAE board. Third, I examine success's

meaning in the way that the success/failure of the school community was portrayed in local discourse during the study. I focus here upon data taken from the meeting itself, from subsequent interviews, and through other, ethnographic field note data. The purpose of the chapter is to bring together seemingly disparate events, practices and statements in a way that describes how success/failure in the school community have been constituted. What I found most significant about the meeting was how *accountability* for the school outcomes on the upcoming national exam shifted back and forth between the principal and the school, the parents and the APEAE—especially the APEAE board president.

According to one local parent, the principal said that he called the meeting in order to avoid being *blamed* by parents for the students' absence. Indeed, the principal opened the meeting by saying that he had asked the parents to attend because he did not want them thinking that school personnel had done something to cause the students to skip class that day. The rest of the meeting focused on who was at fault and who was responsible—both for the repercussions of the students' actions and for taking steps to prevent the students from repeating the same kind of behavior.

How success made its presence felt within Medina Primary

Findings from the present study culminated in what took place during the *saliibhe* meeting, held seven months from when I first began collecting ethnographic data. I say, 'culminated' because the school's *incompleteness*—as described by local people—only became visible as a primary threat to school

community success within the dialogue that transpired among parents, teachers, and school board members present at this meeting. By incompleteness, I mean that the school was consistently described locally as 'out of the norm' for a so-called urban elementary school. Local people said that Medina Primary as not up to par with what they described as a *normal* school because it lacked the six classrooms necessary to educate area children through all six grade levels of the elementary school cycle. Follow up interviews with parents, teachers, and school board members involved or connected in some way with the meeting proceedings further clarified and focalized these findings. In other words, data from the *saliibhe* meeting brought into view certain patterns and aspects of field note data that I had been collecting throughout the course of the study. As far as the topic of conversation at the meeting, the particular threat to school-community success took the form of the potential, wholesale failure of the sixth-grade class at Medina Primary School on the national exam. Failure at the national exam meant that students would fail to advance from elementary to junior high school. This meant either another year in which sixth graders would spend in the sixth-grade, and try to make another attempt at the exam, or that they would have to drop out of school entirely. Given the weight that district administrators throughout Guinea typically gave to sixth-grade pass/fail rates in assessing an elementary school's performance, failure at the exam threatened the school-community's image of itself as successful and responsive—the kind of place where NGOs, the district and donor agencies would want to invest and thus help promote local development.

The possible failure of the sixth-grade students—particularly in such great numbers—meant not only shame and the loss of opportunity to advance for the students and their parents, those immediately affected. It also meant that the school's inherent incapacity to serve the educational needs of all school age children living in the community would be exposed, casting doubt upon the viability of children's education there. Widespread failure at the national exams meant, literally, the failure of the school community (that is, of Medina Primary School and the APEAE as the community's representative) to deliver quality education to the *quartier's* children and their families.

The *saliibhe* meeting brought into view a problem of children's education. The incident of truancy itself was not a threat to student success, *per se*. Students could make up the missed class time. Rather, the incident was presented as evidence of a lack of a particular kind of education on the part of the truant students. This kind of education, called *needi* (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005), was not to be acquired in the classroom. Rather, it was acquired through one's upbringing. (Still, some local people described classroom learning as supporting the continued development of *needi* in children.) According to local people, however, *needi* was necessary to student success in classroom learning. By their actions, the truant students had shown a lack of respectfulness, politeness, morality, responsibility, and so forth—qualities that were necessary for any child to attend to her studies and succeed in the classroom. According to statements by the school principal, school board president, and others attending the meeting, *needi* and its development in

children were the joint responsibility of the APEAE, its board, and the parents—in essence, the entire local community. This broad definition of *community* effectively gave virtually every inhabitant of the *quartier* some role (if only in a general sense) in raising local children. Within this, the role of *parent* was projected beyond those persons directly responsible for care giving, financial support such as clothing and providing shelter to a child to include others inside and outside of her immediate (and for that matter, extended) family. These “others” held some general responsibility for instilling within local children the kind of sense of responsibility that came with good conduct.⁴ How this kind of education was described, and linked to a dominant meaning of success/failure within the school community, is a primary focus of the present chapter.

Before getting to the meeting description, methods, and findings, I would like to add a note on the significance of the meeting and what transpired there to the present study. Although the *saliibhe* incident and meeting cover only a few field note entries in a project spanning over ten months, the meeting stands as a pivotal example of participation in the local discourse on education reform, and for a single, key reason. By attending the meeting, school officials, APEAE board members, and parents were participating in an activity that was not organized through, or directly for, PACEEQ. For that matter, the meeting was organized

⁴ Years earlier, as a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher in the Fuuta-Jaloo region, the wife of one of my colleagues once left me in their house with a number of children—most of whom belonged to the landlord and other families living in the area. When she returned a few minutes later, some of the children were pushing each other, standing on the furniture, and talking loudly to one another. The women turned to me and said, “Mr. Mark! Why are you letting the children do this?” to which I replied, “I am not their parents.” Her response: “But you are the adult here. You must take charge when no one else is around.” Although the concept of “parent” described here is not unique to Guinea, or “foreign” to social life in the United States, this example does serve to extend certain parenting roles beyond members of a child’s family and household.

without the involvement of any (higher) authority from outside of the Medina Primary School community. That is, for at least some of the attendees, the meeting and what transpired there represented *their work*:⁵ what the school community was, collectively, supposed to do. The *saliibhe* meeting was a singular exemplar of local participation, in which the school community operated (more or less) of its own accord. Here was a school community, located at a point far from the so-called centers of power, such as the school district or PACEEQ offices. What was said and done at this meeting contributed more to setting the limits of possible modes of participation,⁶ as members of the school community saw the latter, more or less free from any outside influences telling them what was appropriate/inappropriate, and so on. I will say more on this point, which is critical to both my methods of data collection and analysis, later on in the chapter.

The saliibhe

To organize elements of local dialogue and activity, such as field note or interview excerpts, as evidence of the local meaning of success/failure, I drew a *sociogram* of the *saliibhe* meeting. I used this sociogram to locate, graphically, where meeting attendees sat; I also described their movements (see figure 3). As

⁵ I thank Anne Haas Dyson, Professor of Education (formerly of Michigan State University), for this idea of research subjects doing what they perceive to be “their work” (classroom session of September 19, 2003).

⁶ These two ideas, the one having to with the functioning of power at the point farthest from its so-called “centers,” and the other about the “limits of possibility” in the functioning of power come from the work of Michel Foucault. The idea is critical to the methods used in decisions about data collection and analysis, which I will describe in detail later in the chapter. See Michel Foucault’s (1981) “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* and his “The order of discourse,” in *Untying the text: A Post-structuralist Reader* (Young 1981). The two ideas are critical to the methods used in data collection and analysis, which I will describe in some detail later in the chapter.

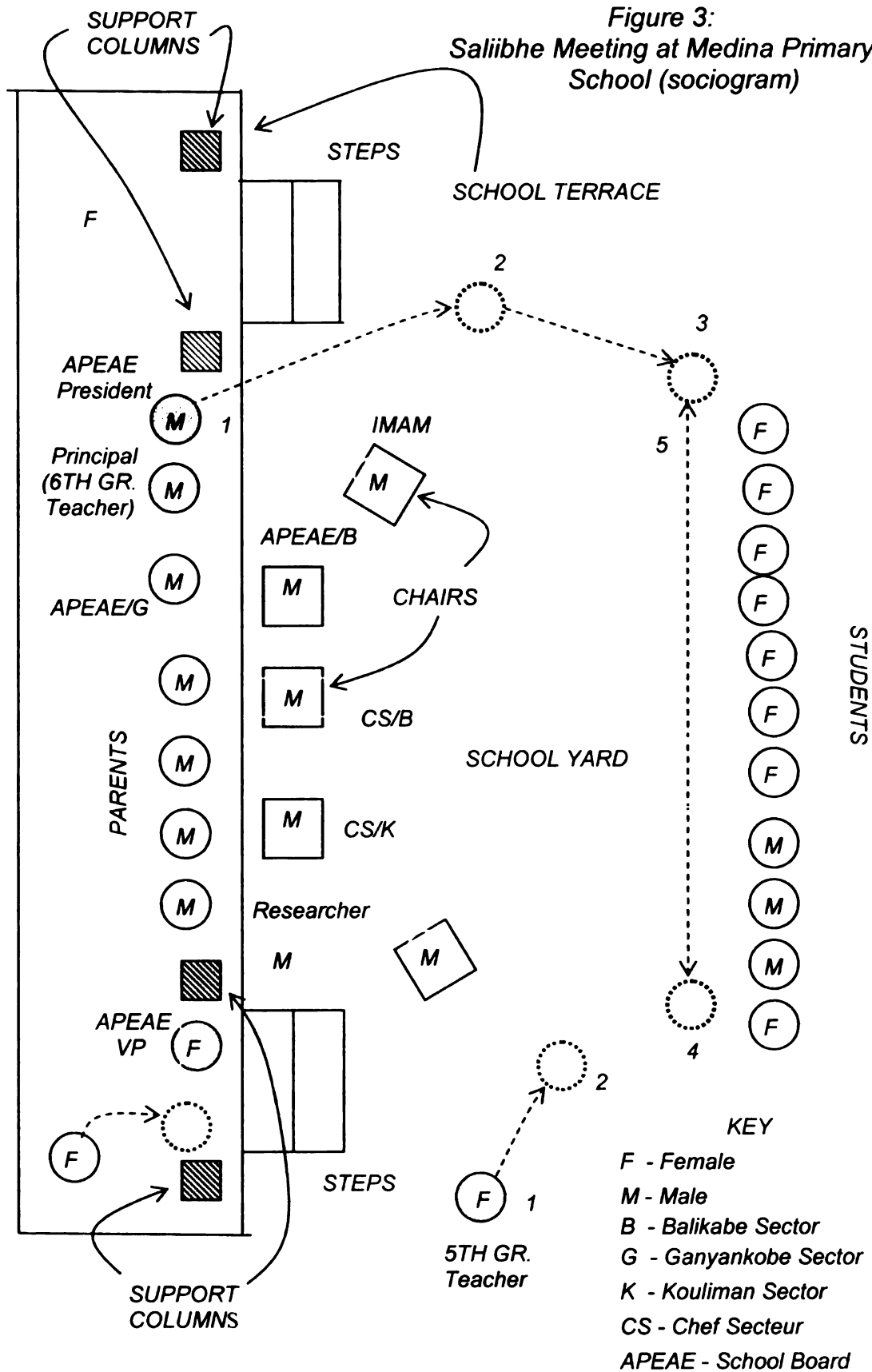
I added to the sociogram, it became a sort of *choreography* of what transpired at the meeting. I drew an outline (or plan) of the school and grounds showing who sat where, who moved and where, and so on. This included notes on what was said and done during the meeting. Above all, the map gave me a visual idea of the context and content of the meeting (see figure 3), as a reference point for organizing and planning subsequent interviews, and so forth. This map was also key to understanding what forces were at work during the meeting: for example, whenever the school principal spoke, and how this affected the proceedings. I completed the map and choreography by describing, identifying key words and phrases employed at the meeting, the series of events that occurred there, and who I would want to interview from all subject groups and geographic sectors.

In this section, I describe the meeting, the series of events leading up to it, and what transpired there. As I later learned through interviews, the meeting had the quality of a piece of theatre for a reason: everything, from the dialogue between parents and teachers to the proposed means of disciplining the students, had been pre-scripted, arranged in advance of the students' arrival by the attendees. This approach to examining the meeting, as *theatre*, was pivotal to understanding the effects and implications of all that occurred there.

Choreography of the meeting

Some of the attendees of the meeting sat along the terrace or porch that stretched the length of the school building, while others sat on chairs placed just in front of it. The *saliibhe* students formed a line, standing and facing the parents,

Figure 3:
Saliibhe Meeting at Medina Primary
School (sociogram)



school board members, teachers, and school principal—so that the two groups (adults and students) roughly parallel to one another. The students were then made to sit on their haunches, where they remained for the rest of the meeting. There were eleven students present, three boys and eight girls. Seven of the girls were all lined up together, side-by-side, beginning from the right (facing the school); the three boys, with one girl seated on the far left, formed the rest of the line. A total of 20 parents, teachers, and board members were present at the meeting, of which five were women. Among them were a number of research subjects that I had already identified and/or recruited for the study. Subject attendees included the APEAE board president and acting vice-president, the school principal, the fifth-grade teacher, the imam, and some eight parents.⁷

Seated on the terrace, in front of the sixth-grade classroom doorway and to the far right (again, when facing the school) were the school principal and the school board president. In a row beside them were six male parents, of which four were research subjects. To the left of these men sat the board's acting vice-president and two women, one behind the other. Another woman sat on the terrace, to the far right of the school principal. (It is worth noting that two pillars, right and left, separated the men—including the board president and school principal—from all of the women, including the acting vice-president of the APEAE board; the men thus occupied center stage.) Seated on wooden chairs just in front of the terrace, from right to left, were the imam and five male parents of authority or otherwise higher social standing than the other parents. These

⁷ By happenstance, some 11 of the attendees had been either identified as research subjects or recruited prior to the meeting. I recruited another two of the attendees later, the criteria for which I explain in more detail later on in the chapter.

men included heads of local families, such as an elder brother of the ceremonial chief of Kouliman, and two of the *Chefs secteur* of the *quartier*. (One of these men, the Chef secteur of Kouliman, came later, occupying a chair vacated by a parent who left before the end of the meeting.)

Standing and moving between the rows of parents and the row of students, at either end of the two lines (attendees and students), were the APEAE board president (right) and the fifth-grade teacher (left), respectively (figure 3). The two of them moved in a way that resembled orchestra conductors, gesturing to the line of students as they spoke to their parents. I will get to the content of the meeting—what was actually said and done—later on in this section. Suffice it to say that the meeting was organized, physically, like an opera or other staged performance, in which everyone present played a part that had been established for her or him before the meeting even began.⁸

Before the meeting

I found out about the *saliibhe* meeting during a visit to see the family of a parent-subject in Kouliman, two days earlier, on a Thursday evening. A child passed by the house with a single sheet of paper—apparently, a note for the APEAE board president. I asked to see it. It was a list, in tabular form, from the school principal, explaining that the fifteen⁹ students had refused to come to

⁸ In a follow-up conversation with one female parent, who had stopped by the school to talk with the board president prior to my arrival, both had already agreed, she said, on some of the actions to be taken with the Saliibhe students—evidence that at least some of the content of the meeting had been scripted in advance. I will include more on this point in the findings section of the present chapter.

⁹ There were fifteen students listed on the note that the principal had sent to the president of the APEAE board, requesting the meeting. As I later learned, from parents and APEAE board members, four of these students were found not to have skipped class, leaving eleven students present at the Saliibhe meeting to answer for their actions.

school on the afternoon of the previous day. Just above the list the principal had written, in French, *Je decline toute responsabilité*. [I decline all responsibility.] (personal communication, April 21, 2005). The note also said that the parents of the truant students would have to come to a meeting at the school that Saturday morning to discuss the incident, or their children would not be allowed back into the classroom.

That Friday evening, I spent the night at the home of the acting vice-president. (I often spent the night in the homes of research subjects, to facilitate ethnographic data collection.) I had asked her and the board president if I would be allowed to attend the meeting, and they said yes. I accompanied the vice-president to the school, and we talked about how she monitored student attendance in class (as well as teacher absences) by pretending to collect water from the pump located just to the north of the school, with a full view of the grounds and the interiors of all of the classrooms.¹⁰ We did not discuss the specific topic of the meeting, however, until we reached the school.

The following description of the content of the *saliibhe* meeting incorporates field note excerpts to describe the events, statements, attitudes, and so on surrounding the incident of truancy. Rather than attribute all of these depictions to particular research subjects, I have chosen to cite the latter only where necessary, as in the case of statements that played a key role in the

¹⁰ Monitoring student attendance and teachers' presence in the classroom has been a key mode of participation in PACEEQ's approach to increasing local involvement in children's education. According to documents and ethnographic field notes, monitoring classroom activity in this way can have a positive impact on school quality. Whether or not this is the case has been challenged in the literature (e.g., Reimers 1997). Local monitoring of classroom activity will become important later on, in the analysis and findings sections of the present chapter.

development of findings. Otherwise, subsequent descriptions included here are taken as part of a web of field note descriptions, and not facts or more direct attempts at sense-making (Geertz 1973; 1983) per se. The objective is to describe events, statements, and subjects' characterizations of the *saliibhe* incident, which are all part of the local discourse on education.

During the meeting

The meeting began with a statement by the principal, who said that the meeting had been called to discuss the problem of the truant students—so that parents would know that the truancy was unrelated to what happened at the school. According to him, the truant students had been present on the morning of the preceding Wednesday, then were absent that afternoon. (The eleven absent students made up over a third of the total of 28 students enrolled in the sixth-grade at Medina Primary.) The rest of the meeting consisted in a discussion of fault, responsibility, measures to be taken to address the problem, and most importantly for my research, a description of the logic behind the meeting. Why had this one act of truancy posed such a threat to the future success of these sixth-grade students, according to local parents and officials?

It is important to note that, while there was some semblance of speaking order among the attendees, those present often appeared to be talking at once—and in fact, frequently did. It appeared, above all, that each interlocutor at the meeting was performing rather than speaking, at times in a way that seemed rehearsed; at other times, more or less extemporaneously. In fact, the over talk that was going on among the attendees told me that this was, indeed, an

orchestrated effort, planned in advance, to persuade and convince. Exactly who was attempting to convince whom of what, and to what effects, is taken up in the analysis and findings section of the chapter.

Following the principal's opening statement, the APEAE board president got up from the school terrace to address both the parents and the students. To the latter he said, *Angal needi*. [You are totally lacking in education.] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2007). In this context, however, a lack of education meant the kind of education that a child received at home—her upbringing. *Bhe maraa needi* [The truant students have no education], he added, while turning to speak to the parents. He then told the students present at the meeting to kneel after having them line up, as described above.

The fifth-grade teacher then spoke, at times her statements criss-crossing with those of the APEAE board president. She gestured toward the students with her right arm and hand as she spoke, leaning forward and looking at the parents seated on the terrace. We do everything to help you, she said, explaining how teachers (especially), parents, and the APEAE had worked to support children's learning at the school. *Yo bhe keldu*.¹¹ [So that you will be well educated.] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005) she said. We prepare the (classroom) lessons. You do not come to class. What can we (the teachers) do? Then, looking again to the parent attendees, asked, Do [the children] have too many

¹¹ *Keldu* is a Pular word that means, literally, "quality," as in a person of quality, of good character: intelligent, capable, strong, dependable, and so on. The fifth-grade teacher was saying here that they and other members of the school community were working so that students would become quality people—in every (English) sense of the word.

chores to do at home?¹² One parent said, no. *Bhe maraa golle ka suudu*. [They do not have housework to do.] Several parents were talking at once, in and over the teacher's statements, saying that all the students needed to do was study. The teacher added, *Feyya passay bhe!* That is, [Go on, advance to the next grade!] Pass the national exam, that is—and advance to junior high school. *Yo on wallondir*. [Help each other!] she added, turning to face the students.

The acting vice-president of the APEAE board spoke, repeating three times as she did the same phrase. *On hersanilan*, she said as she looked at the students. [You have shamed me] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005). She spoke of the United States Embassy, which administered a local girls' scholarship program through PACEEQ. (One of the female students present was one of two recipients of this scholarship.) She spoke also of PACEEQ itself, the regional and communal APEAEs, and the district education office, saying that the shame brought upon parents, teachers, and others (literally, the whole school community) extended to all of these entities. She and the board president, she said, had signed agreements with these entities, which she and the president—and all those whom the two represented—were bound to honor. The students' act of truancy was a violation of the trust between these entities and the school community, she said. It was this violation of trust—trust in the community, the

¹² This question refers to a commonly-cited obstacle to girls' education, that the latter are generally assigned more household tasks such as looking after younger siblings, laundry, and preparing family meals. PACEEQ and other documents, including posters and local radio programs, speak to the tendency of local people to overburden girls' with household chores, which takes away valuable time for school homework and study. I will return to this claim, or theory, later on in the chapter.

school, in parents, the APEAE and its board, and in the students—that had brought shame upon the school community.

Some parents spoke as well. Beat the students if they skip class again, was the refrain. Two of these parents, both men, were subjects in this study and also happened to be from Kouliman. Both were respected, senior residents; one was the Chef du secteur of Kouliman sector. The other man was the younger brother of the ceremonial head of Kouliman, and one of the senior spokespersons of the people living there.

The Chef du secteur had arrived at the school toward the end of the meeting. When he learned what had happened—many of the parents did not know in advance of arriving at the meeting the reason why they had all been asked to attend—he rose from his chair in front of the school and raised his arm to strike one of the truant girls. The girl in question was his granddaughter, and the daughter of a member of the school board. The board president spoke to stop him. *Beppe mo!* the *Chef du secteur* said as he sat down again. [Beat her!] The fifth-grade teacher, upon seeing the girl raise her arm to shield herself, said that this was a good sign. *Himo huli, mara teddungal.* [If the girl is afraid, she has respect for her grandfather.] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005)

The APEAE board president spoke again, addressing the students and asking them to determine the number of strikes of the cane they should receive (as punishment) if any of them were absent from class without excuse in the future. Several students responded, each with different numbers (twenty, ten, and so on). Ten was too few, the president told them. *Sappo e jowi*, he added.

[Fifteen] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005). He then took the note listing the students' names, which the school principal had sent to him two days earlier. *Hidha haldi?* he asked of the first student who was kneeling down next to him. [Do you accept the terms of our agreement?] The student did not say anything. *Bate jungo*, the president said, handing the student a pen and the note, pointing to the space following the student's name. [Sign it.] The students were, in effect, entering into a *contract* with the APEAE board—accepting, with their signatures, the punishment that had just been decided if they were ever absent from class again.

A number of parents spoke, though many did not—including, notably, several research subjects. These were primarily younger men, and women, from each of the four sectors in the *quartier*¹³—all of whom were seated on the school terrace rather than in the wooden chairs. As the meeting drew to a close, the school principal asked two of the men seated in the chairs, each of them from Balikabé Sector, if they had anything to add to the proceedings, anything to say. He then looked at me and asked, in French, *Monsieur, vous avez quelque chose à dire?* [Sir, do you have anything to say?] (M. Hamilton, field note data, April 18, 2005)? I did not respond, not realizing at first that he was speaking to me. I told him that I did not. The principal then asked one man from Ganyankobé Sector, seated in a chair, if he had anything to add. The man said that he did not, either. The principal then asked both the fifth-grade teacher and the acting vice-

¹³ At one point during the meeting, one elderly woman—"parent" to one of the truant girls—did speak at length about the incident. However, as the parent of a fifth-grade student, I decided not to pursue the woman as a potential research subject and so have not included here any of the dialogue in her case.

president, respectively, if either of them had anything to add. They replied that they did not. The students returned to their classroom, and all of the attendees left the school as the principal and fifth-grade teacher returned to their classrooms.

Meeting summary and analysis

In this study, I am taking the *saliibhe* meeting as an exemplar of local participation as it is truly, or genuinely, conceived. I say *truly* because the meeting took place entirely through the impetus of local officials. No entity outside of the Medina Primary School community was involved in organizing or holding the meeting. The only forces in operation, then, were the authority of the school principal and APEAE board president, who called the meeting, and the assumptions they made in the process. As I said earlier, the meeting represented what school and board officials saw as their work, as a task of enough importance to warrant mobilizing parents and *requiring* the latter to attend a special meeting. Officials were even willing, or so they said, to keep the truant students out of class to induce parents to attend. This was serious business to them. I am most interested here, therefore, in examining the assumptions in which the meeting was held, and in which assumptions the attendees participated (or not). What did the meeting mean or signify to attendees/non-attendees? How would they describe the purposes and events surrounding the meeting, and their reasons for attending/not attending? I needed a set of questions to ask people, a set of criteria for selecting them, and a plan to recruit and approach them for an interview.

Before describing the interview process, I want to further examine the field notes from the meeting. What was the meeting about, exactly, from what was said and took place there? Several aspects of the event stand out. First, there was the fear that the truant students might fail at the national exam. Teachers and school board members present each made numerous references to the sixth grade exam, the need for students to “help each other,” and to just “pass” on to the next grade. Somehow, this single act of truancy had brought about this fear. Second, there was the underlying notion that the students’ actions somehow increased the danger of failure—made the possibility more *real*, at least to school and board officials. What exactly increased this danger, this potential for failure? And why hold a meeting of parents to address the issue? It was not the act of truancy, per se, that had brought about this fear—although better than half of the class was involved. Rather, it was what the act stood for, what it meant, in terms of the students’ ability/inability to succeed come exam time.

The third, and perhaps most significant element of the meeting was the sense of shame that students’ had brought upon the school community. They had skipped school, blatantly, in the middle of a regular day of class—and they had done so as a group. This was a sign of disrespect for the school and the people working to help them succeed—including teachers, parents, and the school board. This act of truancy was also a disrespectful to PACEEQ, the U.S. embassy, USAID, and the local school district office, all of which had been helping to improve the quality of education at Medina Primary. This sense of shame was present in statements that the acting vice-president made during the

meeting. That this act of truancy was coordinated among over half of the class was even more disrespectful. To all of the attendees at the meeting, the students had decided, collectively, to do something that they did not have the authority to do.

There are two additional points I want to address. One is that the students' action showed, according to school and school board officials, a lack of respect for authority—both of the school and of the students' families and community. They had come to class in the morning; they were absent for the afternoon session. There was no excuse for their absence, and they obviously were not too concerned about what the principal—who was also their teacher—might think. Worse, perhaps the students had not considered that their absence was a big deal. The lack of *needi*, of this kind of intelligence—which meant having respect, a sense of responsibility, good judgment, discipline, and so on—was a threat to the students' ability to learn, to attentively follow their lessons in class, to prepare for the national exam, and to understand the importance of passing it to their future success. *Needi* was, according to local people, a kind of intelligence that was required for students to do well in school, perform well on the exam, and (hopefully) advance to junior high school.

Another, and final, point has to do with the possible connections between parents' attendance at the meeting, and the role that they played in their children's education. *Needi*, as the kind of intelligence that comes first with good upbringing, was primarily the responsibility of the parent.¹⁴ It was the students'

¹⁴ That parents were endorsing the "beating" of future offenders—an action associated with upbringing, discipline, respect, and so on—was further evidence of the connection between *needi*

actions at play; it was first and foremost their fault. Still, the phrase, *angal needi* indicates a complete and utter lack of this kind of intelligence—and this according to the ultimate local school authority, the APEAE board president. The parents were responsible for their children's upbringing; it was the parents, therefore, who must take responsibility for the students' actions: past, present, and future. This responsibility, just short of actual blame, was also evident in statements by the principal (e.g., I decline all responsibility), demanding that the parents of the truant students attend the meeting before the latter would be allowed back into the classroom. It is important to add, however, that the school board president—as community representative—was himself taking responsibility, as was the assistant vice-president (e.g., You make me ashamed), for the students' lack of respect.¹⁵

and children's willingness/ability to learn at school. However, parents were also giving school and board officials permission to "do the beating." This implies some legitimate role for the latter in the development of *needi* in local children. Yet Guinean students and colleagues with whom I had worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer teacher frequently described in-school beatings as justified if a student showed disrespect of school authority. "He is the student's father [in this case]," one boy said, explaining how a teacher was beating a fellow student for his repeated, unexcused absences and tardiness. The boy added that it was the student's father who was shamed most by this lack of respect, not the teacher.

¹⁵ I would like to thank my interpreter on this research project for helping to clarify the meanings of these critical statements about upbringing, intelligence, and responsibility. My thanks also to Mamadou Saliou Diallo, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Conakry – Guinea, for his insights into the term *needi* and its significance in the context of children's overall education, upbringing, and so forth.

I first learned about *needi* and another term, *hakkil*, during a prior visit to the Fuuta-Jaloo region for language study. Both terms are employed to describe kinds of intelligence—one gained from formal schooling (classroom knowledge, "book learning," and so on), the other from upbringing (meaning, responsibility, discipline, good judgment, dependability, and also "common sense," among other things). However, people with whom I spoke informally throughout the region did not agree on which meanings belonged to which of the two terms. Whereas some people said that *needi* was required for a child to attain *hakkil*, or more formally acquired knowledge, others said the opposite: that *hakkil* was necessary to acquiring *needi* as well. Follow-up interviews to the Saliibhe meeting revealed the same blurring of meanings, in which intelligence acquired through formal schooling was also described as necessary to the development of qualities associated with "needi," such as respectfulness, a sense of morality, politeness, and good judgment/common sense. The term *keldu*, meaning, "of high quality," was also employed at the meeting—incorporating elements of both *needi* and *hakkil*. More on

Interviews

To better understand the almost palpable fear present at the *saliibhe* meeting, I would need to find out more about the rationale behind calling the meeting, from the people who called it. I would also need to find out why the potential failure of the sixth-grade students warranted holding such a meeting, according to parents, teachers, and APEAE board members. To begin with: Why was a simple absence of students from one half-day of class such a worry to people? Surely a single absence was not in and of itself cause for concern. What did this absence mean, in terms of the students' potential success/failure at the national exam? Further, how was success/failure at the exam connected to the success of school and community? Lastly, what connections existed between students' success/failure and parents' attendance at the meeting? Yet it was the way in which the students' skipped class that exposed this lack of *needi*, which was a far more serious matter.

I wanted to use follow-up interviews with meeting attendees/non-attendees to find out more about success in relation to participation. One, what did school community success mean, according to whom? Two, how would parents and others in the community characterize the meeting and their own roles in it? Specifically, I wanted to hear how they would describe the rationale for the meeting, why each of them attended, why the meeting was called, and what took place there. In brief, what did the meeting and act of student truancy signify, according to parents, teachers, and APEAE board members? I would be

connections between these terms, local participation, and success in children's schooling later on in the chapter.

looking for variations among their descriptions, particularly those parents who did not speak at the meeting or did not attend it.

Interviewee selection

To better understand the significance of the meeting, I wanted to describe it according to both attendees and non-attendees. With this idea and approach I am seeking descriptions of the meeting as, first, an event that was more or less locally constituted. Second, I am treating the event as the most local and accessible one to me during the study—that is, of all those formally organized events in which all key groups of research subjects were present. The meeting was organized by local authorities, according to what they took to be essential, important, necessary, appropriate, and so on, operating collectively with parents, the APEAE board, and school personnel. This event, this meeting, was the closest thing I encountered during the period of the study in which local people acted upon their own assumptions. I was interested in examining these assumptions, in which local people participated in children's education—as far from any direct influence of forces outside the school community as possible.

Among parents, APEAE board members, and school personnel, I identified three categories of interviewees: people who had been called to the meeting and had attended; people who had been called to the meeting but had *not* attended; and people who had neither been called to the meeting nor attended it. How would people talk about the events of the *saliibhe* incident? In what ways would they portray the purposes, events, rationales, and outcomes of the meeting? How would they explain their reasons for attending/not attending?

Responses to these kinds of questions would serve to describe the limits of possible local participation in children's education, as perceived by local people themselves.

As it happened, a number of research subjects had already been identified and/or recruited prior to the *saliibhe* meeting; I could then proceed to recruiting the rest, formally, as well as any additional subjects I would identify.¹⁶ All of the subjects identified met the initial criteria already established—which I selected from the four sectors of the *quartier*, in more-or-less equal numbers. I ended up with a core¹⁷ group of sixteen subjects, four from each of the four sectors in the *quartier*—Dalla, Kouliman, Balikabé,¹⁸ and Ganyankobé. I drew these subjects from two families of each sector, recruiting as many adult family members as possible from every family. I identified a total of seventeen people to question about the *saliibhe* meeting: three from Dalla; three from Kouliman; four from Balikabé; and three from Ganyankobé. Four of these were members of the APEAE board, including the president, acting vice-president, and two other members of the APEAE board, both of whom had children in the sixth grade. One of the two board members had attended the meeting. The number of interviewees also included all three schoolteachers, two of whom had not attended, and the school principal.

¹⁶ I waited until a few months after my arrival in Mafou Quartier before trying to formally recruit any research subjects—in order to first establish myself and to develop the lines of inquiry that I wanted to pursue.

¹⁷ I actually recruited more than 25 research subjects throughout the *quartier*. However, some of these I either eliminated or did not use, following the selection criteria and the approved human subjects research protocol for the project. These sixteen people were my primary research subjects, meaning that they served as the primary sources of data for the entire study.

¹⁸ I later decided to reserve data gathered from one of the four subjects from Balikabé, since I had already recruited adult members of two other families from elsewhere in the sector.

Among the parents I identified for interviews, one had attended the meeting, but as I later learned, did not have a student in the sixth grade and was not directly connected to the truant students. Two other parents had children in the sixth grade, but did not attend the meeting—including one of the two APEAE board members. (Yet another parent had not attended the meeting, but was the spouse of someone who had; both of them were regular research subjects that I had already identified for the study.) Of the parents I identified and eventually recruited, seven were men and six were women; one of the men was the imam, the local religious leader from Dara Sector.¹⁹

It is important to note that I examined together the statements, actions, and varying roles/status of meeting attendees and interview subjects. For example, I noted when the APEAE board president spoke as *president* and as *parent*, or both; at times he also spoke as a resident of the *quartier*, a farmer, a resident of Kouliman Sector, and so forth. As president, his statements had greater authority and force in shaping events and outcomes; as parent, these statements carried less weight.

In addition to selecting interview subjects according to the criteria described above, I also wanted to talk with those described as having low status.

¹⁹ In selecting interview subjects, I had not attempted to represent any social categories such as gender or social class, given the limited number of research subjects. Rather, I sought to identify these categories as possibly connected to the social status of individual subjects, which figures in my examination of the statements and actions of each. It is worth also noting that status was a function of several factors in the Medina Primary School community, only some of which were linked to these social categories. However, gender was one category that appears to trump all others; women occupied lower status positions in all of their interactions with men. Yet there were exceptions to this trend, including some interactions between men and the female acting vice-president of the APEAE board.

I especially wanted to include the poorest²⁰ people from among those interviewed, with the purpose of collecting data from those located farthest from the local centers of power: the APEAE board; the mosque; the district administration; families of noble ancestry; heads of clans, the *quartier* board; sectors administration; and so on. By the 'poorest' people, I mean members of those segments of the population that have been described as 'poor' or 'disempowered' within international discourse (i.e., development documents). This approach would give me an understanding of how people on the periphery of power described their participation and role in school community success, to deepen my understanding of how participation functions among the so-called poorest, most marginalized, most distant of all Guineans from power and influence. These people have been described in development documents produced at the national and international level as the *targets* of reform; their participation is therefore a primary focus of the present study.

With the exception of the school principal and teacher, all of the adult attendees were parents of children attending the school, including those who filled school board or other roles of authority within the local community. By parent, I mean that each of the adults could be described as having some responsibility as primary caregivers, providers, and decision-makers regarding the education and general welfare of children. In some cases, these adults were the natural born parents of a school child; and in others, a child had been

²⁰ This phrase refers to the work of Chambers (1983), who spoke of the need to reach the "poorest of the poor" through development programs—that these most marginalized of people in developing countries were not benefiting, and in fact, had been further and further marginalized in the way that practitioners practice development.

entrusted to them, or they had somehow assumed the role of parent in this sense.

Interviews with attendees and non-attendees of the *saliibhe* meeting yielded several items of data of interest to me. One was the reason for the meeting to be called in the first place. According to the school director, the truant students did not appreciate the seriousness of their studies and the need to prepare for the sixth-grade exam; they needed to be frightened into it. The president of the APEAE board said much the same thing, in French: *Il faut les effrayer*. [You have to scare the students.] (personal communication, May 9, 2005). Another item was the issue of failure. According to the school principal (personal communication, May 3, 2005) and APEAE board president, the students had to succeed. The latter said, in French, *Il faut pas avoir un échec cette année*. [We must not have a failure this year.] (personal communication, May 9, 2005). A final item of interest was that the parents were required—all of them—to attend the meeting, regardless of whether or not their child was truant on the day in question. In fact, one parent, who did not have a child in the sixth grade at all, came to the meeting as well; they all said that they did not know in advance the subject of the meeting or the reasons why they had been called there.

The logic of the *saliibhe* meeting

What had transpired at the meeting could best be described as a manifestation of fear on the part of teachers, the school principal, APEAE board members, and (at least some) local parents. I say fear because there was at

once a sense of responsibility for the students' act of truancy and the realization that people really had little control over how well the students would do on the upcoming exam. It was as if the desires, hopes, and aspirations of the entire school community rested with a group of girls whose fate was entirely open to speculation. The idea that a group of girls would be in a position to take such a national exam seemed unfathomable to many parents, who often claimed to know very little about schooling themselves. And yet the community had enrolled large number of its girls in school, with a sense of pride in what they described as a major accomplishment. When I had asked the people present at the site visit in November 2004 to describe their activities, several parents smiled and cited (among other things) the number of girls enrolled compared with the number of boys (personal communication, November 30, 2004).

The belief held by some local people that the sixth-grade students would perform well on the national exam was founded entirely upon the claim that girls' could—and should—attend and succeed in school. This idea of gender equality has been commonplace in policy and other development documents for the past two decades. The same idea has been more and more commonplace within the local school community as well, though not without a sense of unpredictability and risk. One parent, also a school board member from Kouliman, told me that he “only had the four girls” (personal communication, May 19, 2005); he had no boys to whom he could pass on his inheritance, no boys to enroll in school. He added that they (i.e., the members of the school community) were told by PACEEQ to enroll their girls in school, and so they did—something that had not,

according to various field note data, been a tangible objective of all parents there. This act of enrolling his girls in school was therefore one partly of faith, partly of resignation to an undetermined, and largely undeterminable, future. New, previously under-explored territory was to be charted where the as yet unproven worth of a daughter would be revealed.

Images of success, failure at Medina Primary

The *saliibhe* meeting was, above all, about the fear of possible failure of the sixth-grade class at Medina Primary School on the national exams for entry into junior high school. Two aspects of school community life deepened this fear, making the truancy problem more urgent, the possibility of failure more real. One had to do with equity of access to schooling for girls, accentuated by the high number of girls among the truant sixth-grade students. The other was the lack of classroom space and the problem of accommodating students advancing from the lower grades. These two aspects describe how it was that the meeting came about—its rationale. In this section, I present data from interviews and field notes as elements of a varied and contested local discourse on success/failure in the Medina Primary School Community. The purpose is to describe how the *saliibhe* meeting functioned, specifically how accountability for the (potential) failure of the sixth-grade students at the national exams shifted among the principal, the school board, and the parents.

Features of failure

Failure on the sixth-grade exams threatened the image of the Medina Primary School Community as successful by exposing its inability to serve the

needs of the local population. There were four aspects, or features, to this threat of failure. First and foremost was the lack of classroom space to educate all local children. At the time of the study, the school could accommodate a maximum of four classes and grade levels out of a possible six. This capacity meant that some school age students living in the area either attended school outside of the *quartier* or waited until classroom space became available. The school register shows a number of students entering the first grade at the age of 8, 9, and even 10 years when state statutes required enrollment at age seven.

As I described in Chapters Five and Six, the school did not have the full complement of six grade levels; school-age children of Mafou were not all gaining access to a formal education. According to one district-level education official responsible for school planning, a rural school needed three classrooms at a minimum in order to function. Schools elsewhere, however, such as those located in urban areas—or within the seat of a rural sub-district should be normalized to six classrooms. (Technically, Medina Primary was an *urban* school.) When I asked the official what he meant by this, he said, *Une école primaire dans la République de Guinée...une école complete doit être de six salles de classe—six groupes pédagogiques*. [An elementary school in Guinea...a school that is ‘complete,’ must have six classrooms—six grade levels.] He added that, if it was not possible to have six classrooms, then the school must have at least three. This would allow the school to recruit students every two years—not ideal, but functional. He added, “A three-classroom school is not ‘normalized.’ A normalized school is one that has six classrooms” (personal

communication, June 3, 2005). When I asked the same official what was “not normal” about a school lacking the full complement of classrooms (as was the case at Medina Primary), he said (in French), *La scolarisation est bloquée. Les enfants n’ont pas la chance d’aller chaque année à l’école.* [Enrollment is halted. Children are unable to enroll in school each year.] He offered the example of a school with three classrooms, which would be able to recruit students into the first grade only once every two years. A school with six classrooms, however, would be able to recruit new students each year. Students would not have to wait a year (or more), as they had at Medina Primary.

The second feature of failure has to do with how pass/fail rates on the sixth-grade national exam was described by local people and district officials alike as a measure of school quality. If students failed on the exam, then the district/prefecture could lose faith in the school, the APEAE, and local officials; this was apparent from the drive to add two school classrooms, which was listed as a top priority in APEAE planning documents. If sixth-grade students—who typically took the exam two or more times before passing in Guinea—did not advance, they would prevent fourth- and fifth-grade students from moving ahead as well. School personnel would again be teaching to the same children, at the same grade levels, and student recruitment into the first grade would be stalled. So a wholesale failure at the exam signified *school* failure all by itself, worsened because it could further hamper the school’s ability to serve students in the other grades as well—for the reasons that I highlighted earlier in the chapter. First-grade students had already been held at that level for two years because there

was no space to cover a second-grade class, according to the principal (M. Hamilton, personnel communication, February 8, 2005). Medina Primary therefore had been obligated to skip recruitment that year, according to both the principal and the APEAE board president (personal communication, February 12, 2005).

The third, and perhaps most significant aspect of failure was the betrayal of the trust that development organizations, which were seeking to promote the education of girls and children from rural families in Guinea, had placed in the school community. Local school and APEAE officials speaking at the meeting described a sense of shame at the students' behavior; failure at the exam would mean that students had not been serious in their studies. Such a betrayal threatened future development assistance that the school community might receive. *Ko menen bhe watta peremier e nder fula waari ndin fow*, said the APEAE board's acting vice-president. [The district puts us first.] (personal communication, May 8, 2005). This idea of being *first* among all of the school communities in the district stand in contrast to how she described the tremendous loss of face that the students had brought upon Medina Primary. Beyond this betrayal, the possible, wholesale failure at the national exams also threatened to expose as fallacy a fundamental concept underlying local education reform: that girls *could* and *should* be educated, same as boys. Retention rates historically had been low for Guinean girls between elementary and secondary school. In a sense, improving girls' access to schooling had everything to do with improving girls' passing rates at the sixth-grade exam. That

is, the sixth-grade exam represented to local officials and parents the culmination of their collective faith in girls' education. Success at this level meant that maybe girls had their proper place in school after all. Failure, and this already-doubtful enterprise risked exposure for what it was: blind hope, and nothing more.

Fourth, the *saliibhe* meeting was, according to interviews with teachers and school and APEAE officials, about *girls' education*. A full 23 of the 28 students enrolled in the sixth grade were girls; eight of the eleven truant students present at the meeting were girls as well. Yet despite the truancy of several boys, a number of people I interviewed only mentioned the girls. For example, when asked to identify the subject of the meeting, the fifth-grade teacher said, *L'éducation de la jeune fille*. [Girls' education.] (personal communication, May 28, 2005).

During my first visit to Medina Primary some seven months earlier, local people present had cited the high number of girls' enrolled, in response to my question about activities in which local people had been involved during the preceding six months. The figure was cited as a major accomplishment and source of local pride, presented to me along with descriptions of other activities, such as erecting a fenced enclosure around the school grounds. There were, they said, 171 students enrolled in the first through the sixth grades, 102 of whom were girls. The justification offered by the man who gave these figures was, "We need to pay attention to girls' education" (personal communication,

November 30, 2004).²¹ This pride in the high level of girls' enrollment at Medina Primary echoed the goals stated within PACEEQ documents, including, "to improve...gender and rural/urban equity in basic education" (RTI 2004). "Poor, unequal access to basic education" is described as a key problem of *Education for All* (EFA), the Guinean national education reform initiative—as part of the international reform goal of universal access to education (UNESCO 2000). "The gap between girls' and boys' enrollment rates has narrowed...yet remains wide," says a World Bank report on EFA in Guinea (World Bank 2001, p. 13). Further, the report says, the gap between children in rural areas and those of urban areas is even wider. (This reform goal is listed as one of the seven *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG) on the UN Web site to which I referred in Chapter Three—and therefore described as part and parcel of the strategy to reduce poverty in policy and other documents.)

Just as local people spoke with pride about girls' education, they also spoke and acted as if girls' education was a doubtful enterprise, or at least one that required special care and attention. Treating the *saliibhe* students as a problem of *girls*, not boys, was a matter of fear of the repercussions of failure on the one hand. On the other, however, it was also a matter of just plain fear. Were girls just irresponsible, undisciplined, and incapable of serious study? Did they just not possess the qualities that boys did? Or was it somehow more acceptable that boys might skip school?

²¹ This is a field note excerpt, taken during the first visit to the school community site. A member of the delegation from the district education office that accompanied me there translated from the original comment, made in Pular, which I was unable to capture.

Historically, boys were the favored ones in Guinea. Watching a family of women—all in their teens—with their mother during a visit to their home, my interpreter pointed out to me the attention lavished upon the singular boy in the family—the woman's grandson—as an example of the importance of the male child to a Guinean family. Her husband had died, she told me, and she was now dependent upon male members of her own family (and that of her late husband) for help in keeping enough rice and other foodstuffs on hand to feed herself and her daughters (personal communication, May 11, 2005). Girls in the Fouta, on the other hand, did not offer the kind of security that a boy could, in a society where boys were still heirs to family wealth: home, land, cattle, and so on. The APEAE board president spoke to this difference in stature while describing the importance of educating local children. “The girls above all,” he said. He added that it was disgraceful to encounter a girl who did not know how to read. He said he really wanted local girls to become what he called *intellectuels*—meaning, to study and learn to read, and to become *learned* in a formal sense. However, he also said that, of course, one would not expect a girl to end up working in an office someplace—contrary to how he described the term *intellectuel* in Chapter Six. This kind of education would allow a girl to create harmony in her family, he said, while understanding how to show respect for her parents, her husband, and others. This issue of girls' education is what brought the APEAE and the school to hold the meeting, he told me. In fact, if we (i.e., members of the APEAE, and school personnel) push students all on our own—without the participation of local people—he said, parents would not know that they were helping them. It was

therefore necessary to call parents to the school and to ask for their support, the APEAE president said—in order to show parents that the school and the school board was working to foster the children's education (personal communication, May 9, 2005).

There was an air of unpredictability surrounding the enrollment of girls in school, according to at least some parents in Mafou. Even the school principal, who spoke to me of the importance of girls' education, paid homage to this unpredictability, the same kind of blind faith. At least three times before the national exam, he brought ceremonial gifts to the Friday prayer at the main mosque—in order to request the imam's blessing for the students taking the exam. Still, local officials spoke of the high proportion of girls enrolled in the school as an asset in attracting investment from aid organizations.

Finally, in another example of how girls were portrayed within local dialogue and activity, the *Chef du quartier* met with the APEAE board president in February to ask the latter about an upcoming visit by a local non-governmental organization. The Chef wanted to know how many girls were enrolled in Medina Primary School. "Ninety one," replied the president. The *Chef du quartier* nodded and said, *Moyyhi*. [Good.] (personal communication, February 22, 2005). Later on in the same conversation, the *Chef du quartier* asked the president to repeat what he said. The president said, "Ninety *three*" (emphasis added). Whatever the real number of girls enrolled at the school, both the APEAE board president and the *Chef du quartier* described *more* girls in school as attractive to organizations working in education development. There was, within these and other claims

about girls' education, an air of pride, desire, and promise, in which local people described girls' enrollment as a potential inducement to education projects to choose Medina Primary as a site of intervention. This included my own research project.

Blame and accountability

In this atmosphere of unpredictability and promise, the roles of parent, student, APEAE board member, and school teacher/official were set against one another. Blame first had to be assigned, through a complex and subtle process. That is, the students had skipped class, putting at risk their own success and the reputation of the school and community as dependable and reliable in the eyes of PACEEQ, the district administration, and other potential donors/supporters. Given the seriousness of the situation, someone—according to local officials—had to accept the blame for the students' actions. This was, in brief, what the meeting was about: finding out who was to blame for the students' actions and, ultimately, who was to be held accountable for the future repercussions of those actions. Describing students as lacking *needi*, the kind of intelligence required for classroom success put the blame on them; *they* chose to skip school, not the parents or their teacher. The school principal addressed this matter directly with parents, according to interviews I had with the latter, APEAE board members, and the principal himself.

According to one parent from Kouliman Sector, the meeting was not just about the students, and avoiding future truancy problems. It was about finding out what role parents might have played in encouraging students to *rebel* against

their teacher (personal communication, May 22).²² The APEAE vice-president told me much the same thing, responding to my question about why the meeting had been called. *Ko fii paykoy soomunoo koy koy...Fii ko bhe soomikon haray ko yo men anndu si ko e mawbhe mabhen bhe tippi. E tawii woni hinaa e mawbhe mabhe bhen, ko e fedde mabhe kanbhe tun bhe tyippi.* [Because of the students who had skipped school...Because the school board and principal wanted to know if it was the students' parents who had put them up to it. And it turned out that the parents had not done so, that the students acted on their own.] (personal communication, May 8, 2005) Once it was determined that the students acted alone, said the principal, they (i.e., the school and APEAE board) could determine the true cause of the mass truancy: a local dance. Students, he said, had wanted to get ready for a dance being held in the local area that evening, and so together they decided not to return to class that Wednesday afternoon. At the meeting, the APEAE board president and vice-president said, the students admitted that their parents had had nothing to do with the truancy incident—that the students had acted on their own. Once blame had been established, parents and the APEAE could now prescribe punishment for this and any future transgressions, which is how the contract was struck between the students and the APEAE.

²² As a Peace Corps Volunteer math teacher, Guinean colleagues and friends had often spoken to me of such "rebellions." They told me that parents and other local people would sometimes encourage their children to question certain decisions that teachers might make, tell their children to skip class if the parents disagreed with the management of the school, and so on. Later, while working on a teacher-training project at the national pedagogical institute in the capital city of Conakry, my Guinean colleagues described the same kind of phenomenon between university/high school students and their parents, such as we saw take place following a nationwide increase in gasoline prices and taxi fares. Students protested throughout the country, eventually forcing the government to lower transportation rates.

However, although blame had been assigned solely to students, *accountability* was another matter. Here is where the APEAE board president played a key role. By saying, *Angal needi* to the truant students, he was in effect calling into question both the parents' role in raising their children and that of the APEAE board, as the community/parents' representative. He was also providing a warning to students and parents, according to interviews that I conducted following the meeting. In my interview with the APEAE vice-president, she offered the same warning in the form of a proverb: *Ko ka gerto ngal rusaadhon ko dhon gellal ngal yhoyhata*. [It is where the chicken gets its feathers plucked that the *perdrix* (a local bird) will not go.] (M. Hamilton, May 8, 2005). This is why, the VP told me, all of the parents were called to the meeting and not just those whose children had skipped class: to warn parents of the danger that some of the students were beginning to develop a poor attitude toward their studies, so that the parents of other children might avoid the same kinds of problems. One parent from Kouliman put it this way: "There is a hole [in the ground] in front of you [other parents]. If you go there, you will fall in as well" (personal communication, May 22, 2005).

Only the APEAE board president had the authority to point a finger at both students and parents without insulting the latter. By telling students that they lacked the kind of *education* needed to follow their lessons—again, qualities such as respect for the teacher and school authority—he was calling into question the children's upbringing. *Needi* was learned at home; parents were responsible, ultimately, for instilling in their children this kind of respect and discipline. Yet by

invoking his authority as the APEAE board president (and chief representative of local parents), he was effectively declaring his own responsibility (and accountability) as well. It was as if he was saying, "We are (all) responsible." By this he meant the students' parents and the APEAE board, referring to the piece of paper that he had made the students sign. "This contract," he was saying, "is between the APEAE and you students." Thus, the APEAE, on the parents' behalf, assigned *blame*, *responsibility*, and *accountability* with a single phrase; students and parents essentially accepted this, perhaps without being fully aware of this, when the former accepted the blame for their actions. Students would be punished for any future acts, but parents and the APEAE would have to take responsibility for making sure that students did not repeat the same, detrimental behavior. It was the parents' job, in other words, to ensure that students understood the importance of a good education, good conduct in class, and would actually behave accordingly in the classroom. However, the underlying *meaning* was that, since the parents were responsible for students' behavior, then they would also be accountable for any negative outcomes at the national exam. In effect, the holding of the meeting had forged a connection between student behavior and classroom learning that all of those present at the meeting accepted as *true*. This connection, coupled with the acceptance of blame, had the effect of re-distributing or *shifting* accountability for school outcomes between school personnel, the APEAE board, and the parents.

Two images of the capable school community

Here were two, paradoxical images of Medina Primary, as present in interview transcripts and field notes. One is the image of the school as highly responsive and capable, and therefore deserving of the district's attention and resources. This is also the image of the developing community, one that aspired to become more than its rural appearance seemed to imply. The other is that of a school lacking classroom space, unable to meet the needs of all school age children, and a community lacking the intellectual and participatory capacity that it felt it needed in order to achieve local *progress*. The first image is that of a school community collectively engaged and supportive of the school and of one other, and as favored by the district administration when it came to the distribution of new education development projects within the district. The second image is that of an *incomplete* school, outside of the *norm* for institutions of its kind, and therefore less-than-fully up to the task of educating the *quartier's* children. This was the image of a school community that was less than worthy of outside support/investment.

The school community was described in interviews with local officials as well regarded within the district, in several respects. First of all, there were good relations among members of the school community. The APEAE president and vice-president described inhabitants of the *quartier* as "cohesive" and "united" in support of the local school, and of community development in general. Second, the school community was described as ranked *first* with the district administration, according to local officials, because of how well it had responded

to district demands—as I stated earlier in the chapter. This ranking meant that Medina Primary had, according to local officials, won the district’s favor. When the time came for the district to distribute scarce resources, local officials said—such as newly trained teachers or new projects looking for schools with which to collaborate—the school would always get strong consideration. Whether or not this has actually been the case, I cannot say. Regardless, local officials described themselves as having attained this kind of favored status with the district administration.

Third, and finally, Medina Primary was now *educating* children, as a school should, according to local parents and officials. Following years of what local officials described as teacher and principal neglect, and poor student performance, the school was now producing students who could read and write. This improvement had taken place thanks in large part, local officials said, to the leadership of the current principal. In a school community where children had previously been unable to write their own names, the APEAE vice-president told me, there was at least some progress towards the goal of providing them with a quality education (personal communication, May 8, 2005).

During an interview, the vice-president of the APEAE board described the kind of social cohesion between school and community, speaking of the community’s satisfaction with the school and principal. *Himo Keldu*, she said. [He’s a good principal.] She added, *Gila nde ma o dhoo non ari dhoo...lekkol on no fonctionude normal hay fus men alaa yi’ude faute*,²³ *e kanbhe meter lekkol*

²³ Words like *fonctionude* (Pular) and *faute* (French) used here borrow from French language. According to two interpreters I hired to translate interview transcripts from Pular to French, these



bhe bhen. Medhen weltaaniimo telen ngon senngo ndon moyyha non. [Since (the current principal) came...the school has functioned normally, we have noted no 'faults' or weaknesses in him or among the students' teachers. We (i.e., the parents, the APEAE) are satisfied with him and his leadership.] (personal communication, May 8, 2005). In a separate interview, the APEAE president said, "In any event, there have been no problems between the community and the school" (personal communication, January 15, 2005). There was, the vice-president said, a certain *unity* among local people, apart from the school. She said that, once a decision had been taken to act on a school or other local issue, such as hiring someone to cover the temporary absence of one of the regular schoolteachers, the whole community stood together behind the decision (personal communication, May 8, 2005).

According to the APEAE board members and the principal, the school was performing better than it ever had—and that it was in good standing with the district administration as a result. As the vice-president of the APEAE told me, *Jooni haray dhon kadi tellema fii wiugol on hoolaare menen e [district] me [sic] nden hoolondiri fii hondhun si gebhe arii ton ko senndete fii wano ka lekkoljii ko menen bhe watta peremier e nder fula waari ndin fow.* [There is a lot of confidence between [the district] and us. If there was something to be shared

"borrowings" come in one of two forms. One, sometimes a word is spoken/written in its original "French" form—spelling and usage—in a kind of "code switching." Two, a word can also be adopted into the Fulfulde/Pular language, creating a "new" word. In the latter case, both spelling and pronunciation change. Such changes of pronunciation suggest, according to the interpreters, an interlocutor native to Pular but not well versed in the French language. For example, the French word, *programme* [schedule] often becomes, *pogam* in Pular, since the "r-vowel" combination does not exist in Pular. However, for the purposes of translating interview transcripts, the translators did not concern themselves with the Pular spellings. If they had, the word *functionude* would likely have been written, *funksunnude*, and pronounced accordingly.

(among schools), we would be the first to benefit.] For example, she told me that, if the school community told the district that they needed a teacher, they would have one within a week. Other examples she cited included transnational NGOs seeking schools to participate in reform programs. According to her, the district would look to Medina Primary first when making recommendations to NGO decision-makers about which schools would make good candidates for their respective reform initiatives or projects (personal communication, May 8, 2005).²⁴

The principal told me that local children he tested upon his arrival could not even write their own names (personal communication, May 3, 2005). Following his arrival, the APEAE vice-president said, local schoolchildren could now read. She told me that local officials, including the current APEAE president and Chef *quartier*, had lobbied the district for a change in school leadership—which was how, she said, the current principal found himself at Medina Primary (personal communication, May 8, 2005).

According to the president and vice-president of the APEAE board, the school and the community worked well together. Positive relations also existed, they said, among the people and villages within Mafou Quartier. The APEAE vice-president told me that, for example, once local leaders decided upon a particular path or solution to a local problem everyone in the community would get behind the decision taken (personal communication, May 8, 2005). Other APEAE board members and local parents told me that there had always been

²⁴ Several officials cited my arrival, and selection of Medina Primary School community as a research site, as an example of how they said that the district often favors them over other schools/communities.

good relations between the school, the community, and all of the people living in the individual villages that made up the *quartier*. District officials and a district-level APEAE board member described local people as “enthusiastic” (personal communication, November 30, 2005); over fifty people showed up at the first site visit, the largest turnout of the four prospective sites visited, which these officials took as a sign of the community’s commitment to their children’s education. Here was a socially cohesive school community, they later told me, in which people came out to support the school, teachers were always on task, students were learning, and officials could be relied upon to deliver whatever the district asked—from timely student grade reports to entry fees for regional soccer tournaments (personal communication, December 8, 2005).

In contrast to the relatively positive image of cohesion, respectability, and educational quality, Medina Primary also fit the image of a school outside of the norm, lacking the qualities of the *complete* fully functioning school. Six classrooms was the norm, the *standard* to which all Guinean schools were compared and against which they were all measured. Yet Medina Primary only had four classrooms, which meant that the school was unable to enroll new students into the first grade every year. As I said in Chapters Five and Six, according to the APEAE president there was no one residing in the *quartier* who had the intellectual status necessary to facilitate projects to improve local roads and other infrastructure. Only educated people, he said, had the contacts needed to obtain building materials and other resources for adding new classrooms to the school, or refurbishing the bridge that spanned the river separating most of

the *quartier's* inhabitants from the city center (personal communication, December 13, 2004). Some Ganyankobé residents told me, as I described in Chapter Five, that they felt *cutoff* from Medina Primary by a local river, separate histories, and a lack of family association with other residents of Mafou; many parents there sent their children to other schools outside of the *quartier*, which they said were easier for the children to reach on foot. For this and other reasons, people living in the sector described a sense of isolation from people residing in the rest of the *quartier*. Finally, in another contrast to the image of the cohesive, unified community, the vice-president of the APEAE board and other of the *quartier's* residents described local people as occupying two camps: one educated, the other unschooled. The latter were, according to her, therefore incapable of understanding (and hence supporting) things like women's literacy instruction and other local initiatives to improve the state of education in the community.

Summary and conclusion

So what does success mean, anyway? Within the Medina Primary School community, it has meant lots of things. Success has meant having a school with six functioning classrooms, six complete grade levels; it has meant having more girls than boys enrolled; it has also meant having girls who do not *fail*; and it has meant not losing face with the people and organizations who have supported the school community's development. Just as participation has been cast within national/international discourse as requisite to progress, participation has been described as necessary to successful development at the local level. Yet the



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meaning of participation, locally, has been far more nuanced. Instead of a means of ensuring greater accountability, efficiency, and so forth, participation in children's education within the Primary School community meant avoiding the kind of failure that local officials feared would threaten what little clout the school community felt that it had with the people interested in (and capable of) investing time, money, and effort in its future development. This notion of the underdeveloped locality wanting to garner development aid is nothing new. However, the ethnographic findings presented in this chapter show participation to be something other than its common association with such terms as ownership, inclusion, and so forth would allow. Participation was, according to local officials, critical to avoiding the loss of the school community's image as a worthwhile investment—as reliable, dependable, and capable.

The sense of fear that was present within the Medina Primary School community surrounded the locally held assumption that school performance depended upon the quality of a child's upbringing, which was reflected in her behavior while at school. According to local people, the result of a good upbringing in Peul culture was *needi*—a brand of intelligence that meant responsibility, discipline, and respect for authority. This kind of intelligence was, according to how local people described the children's absence from school that day, necessary to a girls' success. However, boys' conduct was not, per se, the concern of the people present at the *saliibhe* meeting. Rather, it was the girls' conduct that was in doubt, according to how the principal and APEAE officials described the meeting and its purpose. For these girls to succeed, these officials

said, parents needed to do their job in raising them properly; parents agreed, both in how they described their children's behavior and in parents' descriptions of the meeting and its intended purposes. The children had begun to show disrespect for their teachers, parents whom I interviewed told me—which needed to be met with discipline. Yet from the level of fear and approbation that meeting participants displayed at the *saliibhe* meeting, they appeared to doubt that the truant girls had this kind of intelligence. According to how local people described the meeting and the events surrounding it, the truancy incident was a problem of *girls'* education, at home and at school. Boys were not described as having a problem of this kind, at least not in any way that was recognized as a problem that involved them. (Again, the school board vice-president alone indicated that boys were involved at all, during subsequent interviews with her, other local officials, and parents.) It was as if the boys' education or their ability to succeed was not an issue at all. More specifically, girls' education—their behavior, exam performance, and so forth—was portrayed locally as imperative to maintaining the school community's image as the reliable, successful institution that it aspired to be.

While boys might lack *needi*, such a state of affairs did not draw the kind of attention drawn by the girls' case. The act of truancy was therefore not a problem of boys' education; it was a problem in the education of girls. The possibility or idea that sixth-grade *girls* might fail at the exam made the notion of failure that much more difficult to bear, to the point that a meeting of parents was called to address the matter. Locally, parents were considered responsible for

inculcating traits of respect, discipline, and responsibility in their children; the school could not be held accountable, the principal was saying, for exam outcomes when the quality of teaching was not (according to him) the issue. Being ready and able to attend to one's studies—i.e., having and displaying *needi*—was required in order that the teacher could do his work.

The appearance of *needi* on the scene within the Medina Primary School community transformed the matter of school performance into one of parental responsibility for a child's upbringing and student culpability for her actions. The effect of the phrase, *Angal needi*, was therefore two-fold. First, the phrase linked student behavior to local conceptions of the parent's role in raising a child. Second, the phrase meant that school board officials and the children's parents could or should be held accountable for student (and school) performance—past, present, and future. What was most interesting to me during the *saliibhe* meeting was how this single phrase marked the redistribution of accountability from the school principal and teachers toward local people. Although this finding does not stand in direct contrast to how participation has been described in national/international-level documents that I examined in earlier chapters, it does deepen understanding of the inner workings of power that has largely been absent from these documents.

On the one hand, participation has been described within national/international documents and the literature as a synergistic, collective, and egalitarian enterprise designed to render local power relations more *equitable* by involving parents in their children's education. On the other,

participation has been cast as a strategy for fostering a local sense of ownership over children's schooling. The case of the *saliibhe* meeting would seem to indicate such ownership, as parents and the school board were cast as partially responsible, even accountable for school outcomes. However, the documents and the literature do not provide the kind of deeper understanding of some of the specific mechanisms in which this re-distribution of power takes place. I am not saying that something like accountability for school performance should (or should not) rest with school personnel. Rather, I am saying that the local power (i.e., accountability) was distributed, shifted, redistributed, and so on less according to people's ability to participate in their children's schooling and more as a function of *pre-existing* local meanings associated with parents' roles. Findings from the *saliibhe* meeting showed that participation was less a matter of inclusion and efficacy and more a question of how the concept was constituted according to pre-existing meanings about parents' roles in their children's upbringing. Parents' success in fulfilling this role was called into question at the meeting, suggesting that enforcing *needi* was particularly critical in the case of girl students. It was as if an especially high standard of behavior was being set for these girls, given the importance associated with girls' schooling within both local and national/international discourses.

In sum, local participation meant keeping girls in line, in order that they do well on the national exam and thus help to maintain the image of Medina Primary as a worthwhile investment in the eyes of people and organizations located outside of the local community. Participation meant maintaining the perception of

the school community as capable and dependable, demonstrated by its capacity to faithfully support the education of its girls through the national exam and on to junior high school. Participation meant retaining what little clout the school community felt that it had with outside resources, in which the image of the marginalized locality—rural and isolated—stood as a constant reminder that Mafou Quartier could not afford exposure as incapable of educating local children, and especially girls.

Chapter Eight: Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

Participation has become a prominent feature of international discourse on progress in Guinea and other countries. According to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (UNDP 2002a), which outlines the country's most recent comprehensive development plan, progress cannot take place without involving ordinary Guineans in what this and other documents call 'the development process.' The concept of participatory development in Guinea has thus emerged as part of a global trend toward empowering ordinary people (Kothari 2001) while re-distributing development's benefits more equitably and effectively. These aspects of national/international discourse mark a shift in the ways in which it has become possible to talk about progress worldwide, in terms of *participation*. For example, recently published documents on development worldwide thus call for the use of more participatory, qualitative approaches to assessing poverty "through the eyes of the 'poor'" themselves (UNDP 1998, p. 9). But what does it really *mean* to participate, according to how local people describe the concept? Further, what, if anything, does local participation have to do with progress?

In the present study I have examined documents, interview transcripts, and ethnographic field notes for the possible or available meanings associated with community participation in Guinean education reform and development, as a case in the international discourse on progress. A focus of the study has been the USAID-funded project, *Community Participation for Equity and Quality in*

Basic Education (PACEEQ)—whose stated objective is the improvement of community participation and gender and rural/urban equity in ‘basic education.’ In PACEEQ, this objective has meant making Guinean schools more responsive and accountable to community needs, expressed via local-elected school boards known as parents’ associations, or APEAEs (*Associations of Parents and Friends of Students*). What most interested me about the project was how certain PACEEQ documents made claims about the ‘successfulness’ of its efforts in the Medina Primary School community. Here is where I first began examining the possible relationship between participation and *progress*.

In the present study, I found that the concepts of participation and progress have become closely linked to one another within local and national/international discourse—despite the lack of research on local meanings associated with the concept. Participatory development has thus continued to propagate, seemingly unabated, in Guinea and other countries. According to Henkel and Stirrat (2001), “It is now difficult to find a development project that does not in one way or another claim to adopt a ‘participatory’ approach” (p. 168). This trend is all the more remarkable given the lack of empirical evidence of material or social change due to participation (Cleaver 1999). My findings show that participation within the Medina Primary School community had come to mean something other than what commonplace terms such as ownership, equity, accountability, and responsibility—terms which have come to define participation within international discourse—are able to capture. Rather, participation had for



local people come to mean avoiding the kind of school failure that threatened future prospects for outside investment in community progress.

Findings from the present study show a definite relationship between local participation and the outcomes of local development, yet in a way that the documents examined in Chapters Three and Four do not address. Whereas the success story document on Medina Primary describes the community as active, enthusiastic, united, and capable of improving local schooling, local people described participation as necessary to avoiding the appearance that they were unable to meet the needs of local children—and especially girls. As I said in Chapter Seven, the fear that was present in local discourse had to do with the threat that possible student failure on the national exams posed to the community's image of itself as worthy of outside investment. This finding provides details as to what participatory development in education has actually come to mean in a given local context, which is something that national/international-level documents and the research literature have not addressed. To date, the literature and development policy have addressed only conceptions of participation present within international discourse, or local meanings in terms of broader conceptions of development, inclusion, accountability, education/schooling, and so forth. However, I have also studied documents and the existing literature to show how participation and progress have come to be described in terms of one another—as well as to demonstrate how far apart local and national/international meanings can get.

Participation as described within the national/international context

Recent policy documents examined in Chapter Three say that, despite some improvement in economic and other indicators of progress, large segments of Guinea's population have remained *poor* and *marginalized*. These documents say that the past over emphasis on national economic growth *excluded* large segments of the population from the few benefits of progress realized in the country during the past two decades. For example, according to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (UNDP 2002a), the apparent failure of past development efforts to reach all segments of the population has led the Guinean government to make participation "the cornerstone" (p. 10) of the development process. According to the document, adopting popular participation is supposed to empower people while engendering a sense of *accountability* and "grassroots *ownership* of the [development] process" (UNDP 2002a, p. 53, emphasis added). These concepts have commonly been used to define both development and participation, which helps to explain how the theoretical linkage between the two concepts was forged in the first place. For example, participation makes for greater accountability, as described within policy documents; greater accountability, the documents say, in turn makes for improved development outcomes. At least, this is the way in which the theoretical linkages between these concepts has been portrayed in national/international discourse on progress in Guinea.

The research literature characterizes the persistent situation of poverty and underdevelopment in countries such as Guinea as due in part to the failure

of the state and the donor community to include people in decision-making processes of governance and development (e.g., Long 2001; Shaffer 1994).

Kothari (2001) depicts the widespread appropriation of the concept of participation as:

an espoused attempt to enable those individuals and groups previously excluded by more top-down planning processes, and who are often marginalized by their separation and isolation from the production of knowledge and the formulation of policies and practices, to be included in decisions that affect their lives (p. 139).

The leap from the idea of persistent *exclusion* of ordinary people from the development process to their *inclusion* was thus not a difficult one to make (valid or not) and participatory development has therefore continued to gain in popularity. Participatory development has become what Cooke and Kothari (2001) describe as an essential, normal, and natural “way of doing business”—and therefore nearly impervious to critique. Similarly, Cleaver (1999) explains the worldwide popularity of participatory development as deriving more from “assertions of the *rightness* of the approach and process rather than convincing proof of outcomes” (p. 597, emphasis added). It is thus the *idea* of participation rather than empirical evidence that has led to the widespread adoption of so-called participatory policies and practices in Guinea and other countries.

Participation in Guinean development has emerged as a development *imperative*: as a logical, appropriate, equitable, and necessary response to the exclusion of so-called ‘marginalized’ peoples from key aspects of the development process. No event has figured more prominently in the rise of participation in Guinean development discourse than the introduction of

participatory poverty assessment (PPA) in the early 1990s. The arrival of PPA in the country coincided with the emergence of two new concepts, human development and human poverty, and the introduction of a new profile of indicators for describing progress. As Peet (1999) explains, these new indicators were introduced on the premise that per capita income and other, purely economic, quantitative indicators could not possibly capture human life in all its complexities.

As explained in Chapter Three, the introduction of participatory poverty assessment in Guinea signaled a change in the dominant profile of poverty indicators. With this change in indicators came a change in the ways in which the *measurement* of progress was being characterized. Quantitative indices such as GNP-per-capita and average household income/consumption levels were giving way to so-called *qualitative* approaches. The latter were supposed to make inequalities of access, income, social status, political participation, and so forth visible—in *human* terms. This so-called ‘human’ development approach meant, according to the documents examined in Chapter Three, making the development process “more *democratic* and *participatory*” (e.g., UNDP 1991, p. 1). Participation was therefore cast as integral to all aspects of development, from poverty assessment to policy formulation and program evaluation. These means of involving people in their ‘own’ development was, according to these documents, part of more recent efforts to replace the so-called centralized, ‘top-down’ development approaches of Guinea’s past.

Just as participatory assessment was being introduced in Guinean development, policy documents such as those examined in Chapter Three increasingly cast participation there, and especially that of marginalized groups of people, as historically *lacking* from the development process. These documents thus depict the absence of participation from this process in the past as responsible in large part for the inequities present in many of the world's societies. According to these documents, participation therefore had to become part of the development process in order for progress to take place. This rationale of participation is thus rooted in a number of ideas: that of the human right to things like education, and a living wage; the need for people to have a voice in decisions deemed to affect them; the notion of self-determination; and, perhaps most of all, the idea that local knowledge is the best source of data on what people most need, and how. As Long (2001) says, "Who better than the poor themselves can understand the economic and social conditions and the problems they face" (p. 2)? Again, whether this or any of the other claims made about the merits of participatory development are true, in the case of Medina Primary or any other school community, is not the focus of the present study. Rather, my aim has been to deepen understanding of the underlying rationale of community participation in education, and in local development more generally—according to parents, teachers, local officials, and other members of the Medina Primary School community.

Participation as described within the local context

Within the Medina Primary School community, *success* has meant lots of things. It has meant having a school with six functioning classrooms, six complete grade levels; it has meant having more girls than boys enrolled; it has also meant having girls who do not *fail*; and it has meant not losing face with the people and organizations who have supported the school community's development. Just as participation has been cast within national/international discourse as requisite to progress, participation has been described as necessary to successful development at the local level. Yet the meaning of participation, locally, has been far more nuanced. Instead of a means of ensuring greater accountability, efficiency, and so forth—which, at first glance, it might seem to be—participation in children's education within the Medina Primary School community meant avoiding the kind of failure that local officials feared would threaten what little clout the school community felt that it had with the people interested in (and capable of) investing time, money, and effort in its future development. This notion of the underdeveloped locality wanting to garner development aid is nothing new. However, the ethnographic findings presented in this chapter show participation to be something other than its common association with such terms as ownership, accountability, empowerment, inclusion, and so forth would allow. Participation was, according to local officials, critical to avoiding the loss of the school community's image as a worthwhile investment—as reliable, dependable, and capable.

Local participation within the Medina Primary School community meant keeping girls in line, in order that they do well on the national exam and thus help to maintain the image of the community as worthy of assistance in the eyes of people and organizations located outside of Mafou Quartier. Participation meant maintaining the perception of the school community as capable and dependable, demonstrated by its capacity to faithfully support the education of its girls through the national exam and on to junior high school. Participation meant retaining what little clout the school community felt that it had with outside resources, in which the image of the marginalized locality—rural and isolated—stood as a constant reminder that Mafou Quartier could not afford exposure as incapable of educating all local children, and especially girls. Participation within the Medina Primary School community therefore meant preserving the image of the committed locality that was Mafou Quartier. This was the image of a community in need of outside help to achieve its goals of progress, and of a community *deserving* of such help.

Finally, findings from the local context show what Foucault might have described as the limits of possibility in how one might conceive of his own participation within the Medina Primary School community. Local descriptions portrayed local progress as possible, if not necessarily likely—according to local conceptions of local progress and participation. Further, these findings demonstrate, as stated in Chapter One, how such things as power operate in more regional and local contexts. The uniqueness of the meanings associated with participation within the local context of the present study thus have important

implications for theory, policy, and future research on education reform and development.

Theoretical implications

The present study shows the difficulty of demonstrating any conceptual or theoretical linkages between participatory development and projected development outcomes. Instead of focusing, then, on whether or to what extent participatory education reform in Guinea has/has not achieved its goal of empowering local people (that is, whether 'X' or 'Y' theory has held up in practice), I have been interested in two, interrelated features of the discourse on progress in developing countries. The first is the widespread promulgation of participatory development, despite weak and inconclusive evidence of projected outcomes. Kothari (2001), Cleaver (1999), and others (e.g., Reimers 1997) have addressed this disconnect between the numerous claims about the merits of participation and actual outcomes. The second feature, and the more important of the two for my purposes, is about the changing ways in which it has become possible to talk about progress. Not only has participation become 'describable' in terms of things like equity of access to education—as essential to all aspects of social and economic progress. It has also been cast as a *form* of progress. However, as I said in Chapters One and Three, I am not claiming that participatory development has/has not been more inclusive, fair, efficient, or effective than have preceding development approaches. Rather, I am saying that participation, as depicted within international discourse, has been cast as an improvement upon past development models. This portrait of participation

emerged in the midst of changes in how development has been described during the past two decades have been taking place. These ways of portraying participation as a logical, effective, and democratic component of development have more to do with assumptions about progress and less to do with actual outcomes.

The PACEEQ *success stories* examined in Chapter Four use of testimonials and other 'data' to depict active, local participation in education reform as part of what defines a 'quality school'—and the capable, self-developing community. In this perspective, increased local participation is cast as an indicator of people's capacity for self-development (i.e., self-determination) through new *knowledge, attitudes, and action*. Martinussen (1997) thus describes participation as part of the global trend toward "development-by-people" (p. 42). This trend is rooted in the idea of self-determination, which has long been described as a hallmark of 'effective' development. Development theory, policy, and practice have for decades therefore emphasized things like capacity building, accountability, and the sustainability of projects and programs—based on how well the latter are *supported* by beneficiaries. However, these ways of describing participatory development (i.e., as ensuring accountability, sustainability, and so on) speak only to how the concept of participation has been *cast* within development discourse, not to any evidence of an authentic linkage between participation and successful development.

Policy implications

The findings of the present study suggest a disconnect between empirical research and theoretical (i.e., projected) development outcomes associated with participation. This is not a new finding, however; other studies (e.g., Fines 1993; Kothari 2001) have asserted the same lack of evidence of the kinds of outcomes claimed by participatory development advocates. However, the findings of the present study further demonstrate that the close study of local meanings is important to deepening understanding of the theoretical relationship that may exist between participation and progress. The study suggests that research into the local meanings of participatory development might serve to cast doubt upon the firmly held policy assumptions about participation in relation to progress.

My objective in the present study has been to offer more than another critique of participatory development. Rather, I have sought to examine a concrete example of participation in education reform from a given school-community context in order to show two things. First, I have wanted to show how much data prior research on participatory development policy and practice has missed by focusing primarily on the efficacy or validity of a given participatory approach. Second, I have been wanting to demonstrate some of the complexities of participation—specifically, how hard it is to ‘know’ what is actually happening when a group of people get together to participate in something like school reform. Ethnographic findings from the present study therefore demonstrate a wide gap between policy and practice. This gap is apparent both in how participation actually plays out within a given context and in how problematic the

tacit reliance of development policy on the concept of popular participation can become. These findings have further implications not just for policy, but also for further research on participation.

Further study

The meaning of participation has historically been one of assumptions. Commonplace terms that have come to define the concept, as it has been characterized within global development discourse, include: ownership, accountability, grassroots, empowerment, equity, and inclusion, among others. For example, as cited in Chapter Three, both Bebbington et al. (2007) and Kothari say that the current emphasis on participation among donor agencies has arisen amid concerns over empowerment. Likewise, Cleaver (1999) says that studies of participation often claim some connection between participatory development and outcomes of greater efficiency and/or sustainability, among other presumed outcomes. According to Kothari (2001), among the arguments behind participatory methods of inquiry is:

the notion that development policies and practices based on research with intended beneficiaries...are more likely to meet the interests and needs of primary stakeholders, and that those development interventions based on local knowledge and experiences are more likely to be relevant, 'home-grown' and therefore *sustainable* (p. 139).

Yet findings from Chapter Seven show that participation within a given local context can mean a whole range of things, which may require other terms and concepts to define it than sustainability, accountability, empowerment, and so forth—at least, as these terms/concepts have been defined within wider discourses.

Geertz's (1983; 1973) work demonstrates the merits of this approach to the study of culturally specific meaning; and as I said in Chapter One, there is a danger in ethnographic research of projecting concepts/terms from one's own culture into that of the context under study (Emerson et al. 1995). I suggest that these taken-for-granted conceptions of participation tend to mask from view the particularized, culturally specific mechanisms in which participation may play out, locally. This idea informed the design of the present study of the multiple meanings associated with the concept of participation within international/national discourse on the one hand, and local discourse on the other. In this respect, the present study has been a comparison of *etic* (i.e., outsider) and *emic* (i.e., insider) conceptions of participation (Pike 1967), in which I compare meanings present within international/national discourse with those present in local discourse. I treat these sets of meanings as distinct, though (potentially) interconnected. Data from the *saliibhe* meeting at Medina Primary School provide a good example of the local (i.e., emic), cultural particularity of the meaning of participation—and the functioning of *power*.

The ethnographic data from the present study show that power and how it operates are specific to context. As I said in Chapter Seven, findings from the *saliibhe* incident show that parents' roles were defined in such a way that brought upon them a particular accountability for children's in-school behavior, and by extension, student outcomes. Granted, this terminology—*accountability*—is not unique to parents' roles as defined elsewhere in the world, such as researchers in the United States have noted (e.g., Laureau 2000). Still, people at the *saliibhe*

meeting talked about parents' accountability in terms of *needi*, as a culturally-embedded conception of intelligence that parents of the Fuuta Jaloo region were supposed to inculcate in their children. As it was portrayed at the meeting, this kind of intelligence (or rather, the apparent lack of it in local sixth graders)—posed a threat to student performance, and that of Medina Primary School as a whole. There was an implied parental accountability for school outcomes within this characterization of children's lack of *needi*—of discipline, respect for authority, and so on. Findings from a close, qualitative examination of local, culturally specific ways of defining accountability (and responsibility) for school outcomes within the Medina Primary School community show the connection between the students' act of truancy, school outcomes, and parents' roles in their children's education.

In the case of the *saliibhe* meeting, it took the *authority* (i.e., power) of the school board president—in his admonition of the truant students—to link the students' behavior to parents' roles. Culturally, however, this was not a simple act of student truancy. Rather, the incident was for the people present at the meeting evidence of a lack of the kind of students' upbringing deemed necessary to their success in school. Further, accountability for school outcomes was not 'fixed' with the parents; they were not fully accountable, according to my examination of field notes and interview transcripts. Accountability for school outcomes was, in a sense, 'up for grabs'—moving back and forth between the school principal, parents, and parents' association board members as they discussed what to do about the students' actions. These two aspects of local

power—its culturally specific way of operating on the one hand, and its constant shifting on the other—show how problematic the study of participation can become.

Participation has been defined within international/national discourse on Guinean development in terms of improved local accountability—at least in part. For example, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (UNDP 2002a) and PACEEQ documents describe popular participation as *assuring* the accountability of local institutions and officials for outcomes, to the people they are supposed to serve. Applying this conception to the case of the *saliibhe* meeting, the locally elected school board (i.e., the APEAE) was supposed to assure school accountability for school outcomes; and in some sense, perhaps, it did. Still, defining participation in terms of some generalized concept such as accountability—as one of having universal meaning, in all contexts—would not have allowed close examination of the particular, localized mechanisms of participation present within the Medina Primary School community.

Finally, in light of findings from Chapter Seven, I return to Foucault, who emphasized the need to study power and its functioning at more regional and local levels. Findings from the *saliibhe* meeting became significant because the event was impromptu, ad hoc, unanticipated; it was organized and carried out in terms of what local people deemed to be appropriate, necessary, and effective in dealing with an incident of student truancy. In other words, the event was as close to a locally *authentic* example of participation as any that I witnessed during the course of the study. The meeting therefore provided a context in which

I might study local meanings of participation, and power, as locally constituted or defined rather than necessarily imposed from outside the school community. Such relative authenticity lends particular weight to findings from the meeting, in two respects. First, the impromptu circumstances of the meeting deepen understanding of local meanings of participation by separating the latter from the so-called regional, national, and international contexts in which PACEEQ was initiated. Second, the local justification for this ad hoc meeting—dealing with student truancy, and the potential threat to school community success—provided a unique context for data collection. This local conception of participation as alleviated a perceived threat to local progress differed from how participatory development has been conceived of within the available literature and recent policy documents: as a remedy for the ostensibly and historically inequitable distribution of power.

As described in the documents examined in Chapter Three, participation came about because of a purported disequilibrium of power between the Guinean citizen, the state, and donors. For example, according to the PRSP, people who had already been poor became, under the 1986 structural adjustment program, poorer still. This imbalance reflected, the document says, the lack of popular participation in Guinean development initiatives. Participatory development was, according to the document, intended to *equalize* this imbalance. As Cooke and Kothari (2001) explain:

The ostensible aim of participatory approaches to development was to make 'people' central to development by encouraging beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them and over which they previously had *limited control or influence* (p. 1, emphasis added).

Popular participation was therefore intended—as the PRSP document and the literature portray the concept—to address inequities in how things like access to decision-making processes had historically been distributed. This model of power, as concentrated with the state and international donors, has come to characterize participation within global discourse on development. However, this model does not allow for an understanding of power as more *locally* or regionally organized.

In the case of the *saliibhe* meeting, there was no direct intervention by the project or district education officials; power was not concentrated with either donors or the state. Further, power was not even concentrated in any one of the three groups—parents, school officials, school board members—present at the meeting. These findings show that power can be distributed in ways other than how historically dominant models of power in development would predict. In the present study, I have therefore attempted to demonstrate the limitations of this dominant model of power by studying what the concept of participation has come to mean within a given local context. Further study of this kind is needed in order to deepen understanding of how participation may function in application.

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