The stages of reform: from the General Meeting to the Ten-Year Programme on Education and Training

GENERAL MEETING: A NEW VISION OF PARTNERSHIP

The policy changes introduced in 1981 may be considered a turning point in the reform of Senegal’s education system.

The sector has undergone a series of upheavals owing to the rejection of a model of schooling considered to be little adapted to modern development needs. The call by the teachers’ unions for a “democratic and popular national school system” showed that the time had come to refocus the school system on the real needs of beneficiaries. In view of its national coverage and the number and diversity of actors taking part, the General Meeting proved a great opportunity for dialogue and consultation, a crucial starting point for redefining the profile of the school system. The meeting was largely responsible for giving Senegal a lead in the preparation of Education for All (EFA) national action plans.

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The establishment of the National Commission on the Reform of Education and Training (CNREF) and the dedicated involvement of the partners in its activities reflect the state’s determination to build up a strong partnership around the school system. This determination has been given expression at the highest level by the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister.

The policy of concerted management, known as “democratic management”, was given shape in presidential Circular No. 007/PR/SG of 26 April 1986, according to which trade-union leaders “must be consulted in all matters in which their memberships are involved, especially all problems concerning careers, transfers, examinations and training.” This principle, which consists of managing the system in consultation with the social partners, is just as clearly expressed in the Prime Minister’s Circular No. 0213/PM/SP of 2 March 1992, in the form of an unequivocal recommendation in the following terms: “I would like these rules to be taken into consideration in your relations with professional trade unions, your key partners in the running of the school system.”

This political will expressed at the top level of government has been implemented in practice by the Ministry of Education. The social partners are now consulted at different levels of the education system through ad hoc or institutionalized committees, including the following:
- Democratic Management Committee;
- Transfers Committee;
- Transfer Forms Committee;
- Sanctions Committee;
- Recruitment Committee.

Although these committees have operated with varying success, they do express a constant policy on the part of the government to base its approach on the principle of consensual management of the school system.

As pointed out in the Prime Minister’s circular, the government’s approach is based partly on labour legislation (see Act No. 6133 of 15 June 1961 and Decree No. 80.104 of 22 October 1980) and partly on the reform of the education system launched in 1981 by the General Meeting on Education and Training (EGEF), in which the trade unions played a prominent role. The advances and consensus achieved on the occasion of that historic event in terms of partnership and social negotiation involving all actors of the school system now need to be preserved, strengthened and extended.

The concept of concerted management is therefore solidly anchored in the country’s institutional tradition, its policies and its official texts, and is the subject of urgent and constant concern on the part of the Ministry of Education and the public authorities. If its application is unsatisfactory in practice, this is due to a large extent to the shortcomings of the management systems, which the Ten-Year Programme on Education and Training (PDEF) attempts to remedy by opting for a systemic approach. While it cannot be denied that the teachers take an active part in the management of the system, in view of the many advisory bodies in which the trade unions already take part (such as the aforementioned committees), there is still a total lack of coordination. Yet without coordination it is impossible to formulate a policy, which should consist of combined activities aimed at materializing predetermined, simultaneous objectives. The assignment