Collective action and the deployment of teachers in Niger

A political economy analysis

Clare Cummings and Ali Bako M. Tahirou with Hamissou Rhissa, Falmata Hamed, Hamadou Goumey, and Idi Mahamadou Mamane Noura

January 2016

Key messages

- The system of teacher deployment and distribution is undermined by the personal interests of teachers.

- There is a lack of incentives for administrators or political leaders to uphold the formal rules of teacher deployment and distribution.

- There is a lack of regulations, accountability mechanisms and sanctions governing the distribution of teachers.

- Parents and pupils who could benefit from a more equitable distribution of teachers lack influence over the system, may lack the means to engage in the problem, and are more likely to find individual solutions.

- Collective action for better public education is rare. Most instances of collective action related to education are either teachers' unions seeking high teacher wages, or local communities working together to manage a schools' resources, usually led by an NGO or government initiative. While teachers' unions state that they may call on their members to respect the placements which they are given, collective action by unions or communities does not directly address the problem of teacher distribution.

- The problem of teacher distribution is systemic and is maintained by misaligned political and financial incentives within the education system. The recommendations suggest a reform to the system which would alter incentives and motivate changed behaviour over the deployment and transfer of teachers.

Introduction

This research aims to examine the potential for collective action to address the problem of inequitable teacher deployment in Niger. Through a political economy analysis involving desk and field research, this briefing paper explores the causes of the problem of inequitable teacher deployment, the power and motivations of different actors to address this problem, and whether collective action could play a role in its resolution.

Research question:

What is the potential for collective action to assist in the improvement of teacher deployment in Niger?

1. What are the political economy constraints which prevent the equal deployment and distribution of teachers across rural and urban areas?
2. Which actors have power and/or an interest in the (non-) resolution of this problem?

Box 1: Methodology

The research began with a literature review of teacher deployment and collective action theory in Niger and experience of this problem drawn from the wider international development literature.

Analysis of the problem was then conducted through participatory exercises involving the research team, which was composed of two lead researchers and three trainees. Based on the findings of this exercise, the research team conducted interviews and focus groups with a range of actors who have experience of the problem of teacher deployment and/or who could support or block a change to this system. Interviewees included teachers, school directors, teacher unions, politicians, administrators at the inspection, regional, and national level, school community associations, and non-government organisations. Primary research was carried out at the national, regional, and commune level within the regions of Niamey, Maradi, and Tahoua.

Niamey town, Town communes : Arrondissement Communal 2, Arrondissement Communal 5

Maradi region, Maradi town, Regional Communes: Chadakori and Tibiri, Department – Guidan Roumdji

Tahoua region, Tahoua town, Department – Abalak, Regional Commune – Akoubounou

The problem of teacher deployment

Key issues

Most teachers prefer to work in urban schools than rural schools and incentives to encourage teachers to work in rural schools are weak or absent.

Teachers are assigned to a school by a regional or national education department and deployment committee but individuals are able to change their placement using their personal contacts.

Responsibility for the education budget is disconnected from the distribution of teachers – those who have control over the budget are not responsible for equitable teacher distribution.

Teacher salaries are paid directly to teachers by the regional or national education department regardless of whether there is an even distribution of teachers across their region.

Those who manipulate the deployment system are not sanctioned.

There is a lack of incentives for individuals to resolve the problem.

The current law underpinning the education system is the 1998 law N° 98-12 'LOSEN' (Loi d'orientation du système éducative Nigérien). This law has guided two successive programmes; the ten-year education development programme, 2002 - 2012 (Programme Décennal de Développement de l'Education au Niger) and the current education and training sector programme, 2014 -2024 (Programme Sectoriel de l'Education et de la formation). This latter, current programme is focused on increasing logistical, financial, and human resources for Niger's economic and social development, covering the entirety of the formal education sector and integrating education related objectives from the Millennium Development Goals and 'Education for All' movement. The existence of the LOSEN and education programmes indicates that at the national level the government has clear policies and programmes aimed at improving the public education system, supported by the international development community. However, there are still numerous problems to be overcome, one of which is the unequal geographic distribution of teachers and resources across state schools, particularly between rural and urban areas (Bourdon et al., 2006).[1]

This research addresses the problem of the unequal deployment and distribution of teachers between different

---

1   Government statistics do not show the distribution of teachers across rural and urban areas but this problem is described in the Strategic Plan for the Programme Sectoriel de l'Education et de la Formation (Ministere des Enseignants

schools in Niger. This concerns how teachers are first recruited and then deployed to schools, as well as the transfer of teachers between schools. The disparity in the number of teachers per school, whereby some schools have too many teachers while others do not have enough, is common to many other low-income countries and, in simple terms, is because most teachers prefer to work and live in urban areas than rural areas. The formal system of teacher deployment in Niger should ensure an equal deployment and distribution of teachers to all state schools across the country, however in reality this system is only partially implemented.

In Niger, there are two categories of teachers; contract teachers ('contractuels'), who constitute the majority of teaching staff, and permanent teachers ('titulaires').[2] Contract teachers are recruited, deployed, and paid by the regional education departments while teachers with a permanent public sector contract are managed at the national level. The deployment of teachers to primary and secondary schools is managed by a committee for teacher deployment in their respective separate regional or national departments (La Direction Regionale (ou Nationale) de l'Enseignement Primaire and La Direction Regionale (ou Nationale) pour l'Enseignement Secondaire). The committees for teacher deployment are composed of representatives from the regional education administration, teachers' unions, school management committees (CGDES),[3] local level administration, and students' parents associations. They meet to assess the need for teachers in their region and approve or deny teachers' application for a transfer to another school.[4] These committees allocate teachers to the education inspection offices in their region which then distribute the teachers across the schools in their area.[5]

The deployment of teachers is not based on teachers' preferred location and so it is very common for teachers to request a transfer to a different school. Teachers are particularly likely to request a transfer if they are posted to a rural school. Many teachers prefer to live and work in an urban area since the facilities are better, their family may live in the town, there are more opportunities for extra work in a private school,[6] and it is easier to study a university course while teaching.[7] Contract teachers are also paid in person at the regional education office which is located in the urban centre of each region. This means teachers in rural areas have to travel to the centre every month to collect their salary. While in theory there is a budget to cover such additional costs which teachers may face if they go to work in a rural area, in reality this is neither readily available nor sufficiently large for each region.[8] There are other teachers who would prefer a placement in their home village, especially if their family is there, and so may be unwilling to accept a teaching placement elsewhere. The formal rules permit a teacher to object to their placement on the grounds that either their health is too poor to live far from a hospital, or that their husband works in the armed forces and has been assigned to a different area of the country.[9] A teacher may appeal to the local education inspection who passes their request to the regional department for approval. If this is denied, the teacher must decide whether to accept their original placement, wait another year to be assigned to a different school, or choose to leave the teaching profession.

However, several interviewees[10] described how most teachers are able to have their transfer approved regardless of the official criteria. Many teachers are female and within Nigerien culture it is considered obligatory for a women to live in the same place as her husband. Therefore, if a female

---

2   The introduction of contract teachers was a response to the Education for All goals which were demanded by the international community. While this did result in an increase in the number of teachers in the education system and lowered the cost of individual teachers' salaries, the recruitment of contract teachers is criticised for not being rigorous and for bringing in low-quality teachers who do not view teaching as their vocation. According to the Ministry for Education's Annual Statistics 2013-2014, permanent teachers constituted only 21% of all teaching staff during this period (Republique du Niger, 2014: p.167). The implications of this for teacher deployment are discussed later in the analysis.

3   Comités de Gestion des Etablissements Scholaires (formally called 'CoGes')

4   The deployment of teachers is not done in coordination with the regional departments for teacher training (Les Directions Regionales pour la Formation Professionelle). As a result, the number of teachers who are trained each year is not planned in coordination with the demand for teachers in particular regions or communes of Niger, nor in relation to the subjects for which there is a lack of teachers.

5   There does not appear to be a law or set of regulations governing this process and each region self-organises.

6   Teachers in state schools do not necessarily work all day every day but rather teach specific classes. It was commonly reported for teachers to use their free periods to teach lessons in a private school instead.

7   It was common for interviewees to complain that, due to the introduction of contract teachers, many university students become teachers while they are still studying. Students who are also teachers were often criticised for not being dedicated to teaching and seeking a posting in an urban or peri-urban school near to their place of study.

8   Salary payments are frequently delayed which results in teachers being away from their work for several days each month, which not only disincentives teachers from working in rural areas but evidently also damages the quality of education in rural schools.

9   The family reunification clause allows women to join their husbands but not vice-versa. It applies to both contract and permanent teachers but permanent teachers can use this clause more easily because it is included in a memorandum specifically for permanent teachers - CIRCULAIRE n°033/MFP/T du 19 juin 1990.

10 For example, interviews with a teacher, primary school director, inspector, and teacher unionist in Commune 2, and with a teacher at the Maradi teacher training college, with a director of a primary school in Maradi, and with the director of a secondary school in Tibiri, Maradi.

teacher requests a transfer so that she can live with her husband, this is granted. Others may be able to use their personal contacts within politics or the administration to ensure their transfer request is approved. It is openly acknowledged and widely noted that supporting a political party in power guarantees a 'good' placement and that personal relations between teachers and their friends and acquaintances enables them to influence their placements or transfer. As a result, there are far more teachers posted to the more desirable urban schools than to schools in rural areas, which leaves rural schools understaffed (Bennell, 2004). Teachers may transfer from rural to urban schools within the same region or across regions and as such, disparity between rural and urban schools exists across the whole of Niger.

Teachers are able to use personal relations to undermine the formal system for deployment and distribution because the committees at the regional and national level, who have the power to approve or disapprove appeals, have little incentive to adhere to the formal system. While responsible for the distribution of contract teachers, neither the regional teacher deployment committees nor the inspection offices are sanctioned by central government if there are too few teachers in rural schools. Payment of teachers' salaries is allocated to the region based on the number of teachers working in that region rather than on an agreed ratio for the number of teachers per school and per pupil. This means that regions are able to pay teacher salaries even if they have failed to ensure adequate or equitable deployment or when they have an over-supply of teachers. The regional administration does not have a budgetary restriction on the number of teachers allocated per school or per commune. The only budgetary restriction is the total number of teachers in the region.

While it could be assumed that the Ministry for Education, and politicians more generally, want a more equitable distribution of teachers across all schools in order to improve pupils' education outcomes, there is little evidence that this a priority issue. It appears that addressing visible problems within the education system, such as a lack of schools, or classrooms, or education materials, receives far more political attention than the distribution of teachers. This is a commonly reported phenomenon whereby politicians and administrators can provide visible, tangible improvements, such as finance for a new classroom, more easily than addressing systemic problems of accountability within the education system. Providing visible improvements is also more likely to be noticed by voters or patrons and so there are far greater personal incentives to engage in problems, such as a lack of

materials, than engaging in the wider reaching, less visible problem of the unequitable distribution of teachers.

Consequently, for those working within the education system or within politics, there are few personal incentives to uphold the formal rules for teacher distribution since this would confront patronage relations between individuals throughout the system. While the efficacy of the education system would most likely improve if the formal rules were upheld, and could be measured and noticed by an improvement in Sustainable Development Goal indicators, it is unlikely that an individual directly enforcing the formal rules would be rewarded. As one interviewee commented, 'the sector cannot resolve itself, the teachers can't solve it because their interests are involved. Even if a Director of Human Resources tried to change this behaviour, he would be removed from his job.'[11] Currently, therefore, the incentives to win political support through patronage outweigh the incentives to win support through demonstrating an effective education system, which thus reduces support from political parties for administrators to uphold the formal rules.

Power and interests in teacher deployment

A political economy analysis examines the power relations and interests of actors which shape how and why they behave with respect to a particular issue. In this research, an analysis of power and interests is used to examine whether there is potential for particular actors to have shared interests and act collectively to change teacher deployment. This research aimed to identify who has power to influence deployment in the formal public sector, who would benefit from a more effective and efficient deployment of teachers, and whether an alliance of these actors' interests could generate a change in the situation.

Administrators at the national and regional level

There is an awareness in the Ministry for Education that unequal teacher deployment is a problem for the education system, and some measures have been to taken to address this.[12] For example, the national primary education department decided, without political impetus, to prohibit any further recruitment of contract teachers to primary schools in Niamey and the Ministry for Education has incentive schemes which provide extra money to teachers travelling to rural areas. However, these only partially address the problem since teachers are still able to apply for transfers to primary schools in the capital and the money for the incentive scheme is not sufficient and is not always released to the regional departments on time. There

11 Interview with the assistant education inspector and the head of education services for Arrondissement Communal 2, and with the Director of Human Resources for Primary Education at the MEN/A/PLN

12 Interviews with the director of human resources in the national department for primary education, and with employees from the regional departments for primary and secondary education in Niamey.

are also three official education consultation councils[13] which have the task of improving education at their respective levels. This demonstrates that there are formal structures for addressing problems in the education system but it appears that they lack the power and motivation to actively engage in improving education.

Furthermore, although the regional education departments, teacher deployment committees, and inspection offices are responsible for teacher deployment and should be able to uphold the system, it is clear that their power is frequently undermined by the influence of political and personal contacts. Teachers who do not comply with the formal system are not sanctioned, and individuals working in the education departments, deployment committees, and inspection offices are likely to suffer political or personal blackmail, and may even risk losing their job if they attempt to impose the formal rules.[14] There are cases whereby regional directors are reported to have enforced the formal rules on deployment and transfers but these are exceptional and all of these cases occurred prior to the introduction of multiparty democracy.[15] Several interviewees commented on the politicisation of the education sector following the introduction of a multiparty system, which they deem to have enabled more personal rent seeking and less accountability and sanctioning of non-adherence to the formal rules.

Administration at the local level

The education inspection offices work across one or more communes and are responsible for allocating the teachers they receive from the regional office to schools in their area. They are also oversee the provision of education locally which mainly concerns teacher absenteeism and the construction and maintenance of school buildings. The education inspection has limited formal authority and while it does play a role in the initial distribution of teachers, it does not approve or deny transfer requests. If there is a problem with staffing at the local level, the commune, inspection or department authority may contact the regional office to request a solution but has no power to resolve it themselves. As one education inspector described, "We don't have the liberty to transfer teachers according to need: this is the first problem for the 'inspection'" and added that, "politicians always put pressure on us."[16,17] Administrative roles at the local level clearly lack formal power and are vulnerable to the interests of politicians and their patrons.

Politicians and political parties

At the national level, members of parliament have both formal and informal power to inform policy and resource allocation. They do, according to their formal position, have power to address the system of teacher deployment and payment. However, the budget for public education in Niger is supported by international donors who temporarily withdrew a large proportion of funding following a corruption scandal during 2002 to 2005.[18] Consequently, while politicians can influence the priorities for the education sector, its policies, sanctions, and how funding is allocated, their power can be limited by the actual availability of funds.

At the municipal and commune level, councillors and mayors do not influence the formal education policy but do have some informal power to influence a local teacher's transfer to another school. Local politicians' power resides primarily in their ability to pass requests for teachers' transfersto personal contacts further up their party. In general, interviewees did not feel that the mayors have the ability to direct or greatly influence the provision of education in their commune.[19]

Traditional leaders, such as village and canton chiefs also have some power within their community but they were not reported to engage in the deployment and distribution of teachers in their area. One village chief described problems in local schools as being the responsibility of the mayor, director, and education inspection, and commented that he does not usually intervene.[20]

---

13 Conseil Sous Régional de l'Education (CSRE), Conseil Régional de l'Education (CRE) and Conseil National de l'Education (CNE)

14 Interview with Director of Human Resources in The National Department for Primary (MEN/A/PLN)

15 Interview with the director of the office for monitoring and evaluation of educational outcomes.

16 Interview with education advisors in 'inspection' office, Guidan Roumdji, Maradi

17 « Nous ne sommes pas libres d'affecter les enseignants selon le besoin : ceci est le 1ER problème de l'inspection …Les politiciens de tout bord font pression sur nous »

18 According to discussion with fellow researcher – Between 2002 and 2005, two senior politicians with responsibilities in the Ministry for Education were arrested, along with a number of collaborators, for having embezzled around 4 billion FCFA from the implementation budget for the 10 year Education Development Programme (PDDE 2002 – 2012).

19 Interview with the Head of Education Services and the Secretary General of Arrondissement Communal 2, with an budget officer from the Ministry for the Economy and Finance, and with the Secretary General of the Commune of Akoubounou (Abalak)

20 Interview with a Chef du Quartier in Niamey

Teachers' unions

Teachers' unions in Niger are numerous and active in demanding better working conditions and higher pay. Strikes by one or more unions are common and often cause considerable disruption to schools and public life more generally. With respect to teacher deployment and transfers, the unions defend teachers' right to fair placements and transfers, and they are members of the transfer committees although they only have a consultative role. However, if a union member feels they have been treated unjustly, their union may intervene on their behalf by holding meetings with administrators at the commune, department, or regional level to negotiate a change.[21] Unions may campaign on issues specifically affecting rural teachers such as payment of travel bursaries to cover the cost of travelling to work in a rural school but this is done in the interest of these teachers rather than a concern for the lack of teachers in rural schools.

While unions do have sufficient power to change an individual teacher's placement or transfer, they do not intervene to make the distribution of teachers more equitable since this is not necessarily in teachers' interest. Teachers are divided across more than 50 unions which, despite the existence of two umbrella groups, 'FUSEN (Fédération unitaire des syndicats de l'éducation) and, CPRASE (cadre permanent de réflexion et d'action sur le système éducatif), do not act collectively to demand a change. Rather, interviewees frequently complained about the politicisation of the unions, meaning that the unions follow the wishes of a political party instead of defending the interests of their members. Unions were often reported to accept bribes from political parties to call off a strike, rather than enter into real dialogue over their dispute.[22]

NGOs and community associations

There are numerous national and local non-governmental organisations (NGO) which have charitable objectives related to the provision of education in Niger. This research studied the interventions of larger NGOs as well as local-level community associations which deliver a range of projects, including literacy programmes, teacher training, schooling for girls, community-run schools, and education for adults. With respect to the problem of teacher deployment however, few organisations attempt to address this directly. One organisation which was consulted, the Association for Equitable Development (L'Association pour le Development Equilibré), works with CARE, UNICEF and others to organise discussions with education officials about how the education system could be improved, including the distribution of teachers but no concrete changes have resulted yet.[23] Other organisations work with communities and schools to support local improvements. For example, one organisation Agir supports the establishment of schools in rural areas and creates special conditions aimed at attracting teachers to the school, such as providing them with accommodation which has water and solar panels.[24] A similar initiative is implemented by an NGO, Caritas Developpment Niger, which provides study grants to inhabitants of the rural commune of Bermo to encourage them to train as teachers and health workers and then return to work in their commune.[25]

The effectiveness of these initiatives is not clear although the projects which work intensively with particular schools appear to be successful in retaining local teachers. This is partly because NGOs sometimes ask the Ministry for Education to allow the teachers who they have trained to remain in their project implementation area so that their project is not disrupted. It should be recognised that these interventions are not taken to scale and so their current impact is limited and they do not improve the system for teacher deployment at the regional or national level. As noted in the wider literature, the participation of parents and the local community in school management can be important for increasing teacher performance but co-ordination at the national level is also important for addressing regional and national inequalities (Birdsall et al., 2005; Bourdon et al., 2010).

School directors

School directors are not responsible for the recruitment or transfer of teachers. As directors, their role is to manage the daily functioning of the school, teacher performance, and school resources. Within this, they have relative freedom to work with the school management committee to gather resources for the school and decide how they are spent. However, in relation to teacher deployment, school directors have little power to sanction teachers. Directors of schools which have a shortage of teachers may have to combine teaching with managing the school or may have to allow very large class sizes.[26] For example, one school director expressed frustration at his lack of influence over teacher recruitment and urges pupils' parents to recognise

---

21 Interview with teacher and unionist in a secondary school in Tibiri, Maradi

22 Interviews with the Head of Office of the town hall in Niamey, with the director of a secondary school in Tibiri, Maradi, and with the director of an Islamic school in Niamey

23 Interview with association director, Maradi

24 Interview with former Agir employee, Maradi

25 Interview with employee in the Maradi office

26 Interview with school director of a primary school in Commune 2, Niamey

their collective power and demand improvements although the parents do not appear to actually do this.[27] Another school director commented, "It's difficult to manage my staff because they have political connections which they use to pursue their own interests."[28] Thus, while this undermines the system of deployment to the school's detriment, it may also be possible for a school director to influence teacher deployment if they too have influential political connections.[29] Overall however, despite evident commitment of directors to their work, they have very little control over which or how many teachers are allocated to their school.

School community associations

Following recent education reforms, each school now has a CGDES composed of seven volunteers from teachers, parents and the local teacher-mothers association. The CGDES take part in the management of their school's resources, encourage parents to contribute money and other resources to the school, and represent the interests of the community to the school director. There is often a parents' association (Association Parents d'Elèves) and a teacher-mothers association (Association des Mères Educatrices) which, together with the CGDES, connect the school staff to pupils' parents and the local community and encourage community participation in improvements to the resources and physical structure of the school. These associations are motivated to improve the quality of education in their community and may call for unsatisfactory teachers to be replaced.[30] However, only the few CGDES members which sit on their regional teacher deployment committee have any influence over teacher deployment and distribution. Most CGDES members cannot intervene in the recruitment of teachers or prevent a teacher from transferring to another school. The members of the CGDES who were interviewed for this research frequently commented on their lack of resources to address problems in their school, and that it is the responsibility of the school director to appeal to the local education inspection for more teachers.

The clear beneficiaries of an improvement in the distribution of teachers would be school pupils and their families. However, it is clear that they rarely engage in the management of their school, apart from through the school community associations. Their lack of action over the unequal distribution of teachers is discussed further in the following two sections.

Collective action as a solution?

Key issues

The research did not identify any examples of collective action on teacher deployment.

Action taken by communities addresses immediate needs, not systemic problems and tends to be instructed by the government or an NGO.

Action taken by NGOs to address teacher deployment are focused on improving particular schools rather than the cause of the problem and are unlikely to be sustained without the support of the NGO.

Teacher deployment and collective action

In development studies, collective action for service delivery is often understood as a way for a local community to resolve a delivery problem by acting together and co-producing a service. This could, for example, be community-managed water pumps or a community-run school. However, attempts by donors to support collective action have had mixed results. Programmes often fail to consider the cost of collective action for participants and the risk of opening up a public service to existing power relations in a community which does not necessarily ensure equitable access to the service and may be vulnerable to rent-seeking and political manipulation (Chowns, 2014). More recently, collective action has been discussed in terms of political alliances and negotiation whereby unlikely arrangements of actors are found to have particular shared interests which lead them to work together to bring about a change in policy. For example Booth (2014) describes how a team of development practitioners negotiated political alliances to bring about significant policy reform to land titling in the Philippines. This approach to collective action for policy reform is discussed further in the recommendations of this report.

With respect to Niger, the education system has been subject to numerous government reforms which have attempted to reduce the cost of service provision for the state by involving school communities in the production and management of services locally (Körling, 2011). This is not necessarily collective action but rather an instruction

---

27 Interview with school director in Maradi town

28 Interview with school director in Tibiri, Maradi. "C'est difficile de gérer les employées parce qu'ils ont des relations politiques qu'ils utilisent pour poursuivre leurs intérêts "

29 Interview with CGDES members from a primary school in Commune 2, Niamey

30 According to the decree 000039/MEN/A/PLN/SG, the CGDES should oversee the behaviour and attitude of the teachers in their school.

from government for community associations to be formed and be partly responsible for the functioning of their local school. These reforms have partially decentralised responsibility for primary and secondary schools to the local level but in reality communities do not have sufficient resources to collectively buy construction and education materials for their schools. This means that while communities are allowed to find ways to increase a school's equipment, they still lack financial resources and there is an absence of accountability to higher tiers of government which allows for personal interests to distort service quality. This partial decentralisation does not address regional inequalities in education and may exacerbate inequalities between schools in relatively wealthy and poor communities.

Existing collective action on public education

The analysis provided thus far indicates that the lack of accountability, sanctions, and incentives related to the equitable distribution of teachers, combined with strong patronage relations which inform political priorities means that an individual is unlikely to act alone to address the problem of deployment. It is therefore worthwhile to ask whether a change in the deployment of teachers could be brought about by a group of individuals acting collectively.

To examine possibilities of collective action occurring between the actors discussed above, it is useful to first reflect on whether collective action related to teacher deployment, or the education system more generally, already exists. Understanding the conditions in which collective action already occurs in Niger may indicate the potential for further collective to be facilitated with respect to teacher deployment.

Firstly, the clearest example of collective action over the education system are the strikes and protests frequently organised by teachers' unions. However, as described earlier, these do not address the problem of inequitable teacher deployment but rather demand improvements to teachers' salaries and working conditions.

With respect to the school community, there are a number of examples of how collective action is taken to resolve problems with a school's resources or general functioning. The most frequently occurring example is the activities led by the CGDES, which encourages parents to pay a small voluntary fee at the beginning of every school year to pay for furniture, education materials, and construction materials for the school. The CGDES members discuss the needs of their school with the school director, teachers and in some case with students and they

call a meeting with the pupils' parents to present their plan for improving the school and ask for their support. The interviewees described this as a normal activity, expected by the parents, and which is only capable of addressing basic needs, such as the construction of a straw classroom. In particular cases, the school director may encourage greater involvement of parents in supporting the school. For example, a primary school director in Maradi urges parents to address the local authority over problems in their school and has organised a 'school community cantine' (« cantine scolaire communautaire ») where spare food is donated from nearby restaurants to give pupils a free lunch.[31]

Schools do have relative freedom to resolve their problems in creative ways or to seek support from a donor or an NGO. For example, activities described by interviewees included selling used textbooks to generate some money for the school, or appealing to a donor for support. However, one school director stated that he and his staff do not have time to engage in these extra activities and that they do not have any contacts with donor organisations so increasing their school's resources is not possible.[32] Further still, other directors complained that donors or NGOs do not respond to the needs of the school but deliver the programmes they have designed themselves.[33]

Another way in which the school community may act to resolve problems in their school is by collectively approaching the local authority. For example, the director of a primary school in Niamey went with the local chief (chef du quartier) to ask the commune mayor to improve the waste collection from their school. This did have an immediate response but only in the short-term and then the non-collection of waste resumed. The school director felt that the local chief did not have enough power to persuade the mayor to prioritise the school when the commune's resources were limited and that there were many schools with similar problems.[34] This is not necessarily collective action but suggests that community representatives at the local level have limited power, even when working together, to demand a long-term improvement to their local school.

More extensive collective action at the school level is sometimes led by an NGO, such as CARE's former programme for community schools and the Maradi based association, Agir which supports the creation and management of schools in particular rural areas. Such programmes very actively encourage community participation in the creation and running of a local school and are implemented in areas where state schools are

---

31 Interview with the director of a primary school in Maradi town

32 Interview with the director of a private school in Niamey.

33 Interviews with two school directors in Shadakori and Tiberi, Maradi

34 Interview with the director of a primary school in Commune 2, Niamey

lacking. Two interviewees in Niamey commented that high community involvement in managing a school only works in rural areas and that community members are encouraged to do this by the government or an NGO.[35] Indeed, this research found that collective action to improve a rural school is usually instigated by an NGO, which begins by advocating the importance of education to the community before then encouraging community members to participate in the building and management of a school.[36] As the director of an association which provides informal education to adults in rural areas commented, 'It's difficult for adults to prioritise education when they need to look after their animals. We use activity leaders to raise adults' awareness of the importance of education and we give credit or animals to parents to incentivise them to send their children to school.'[37,38]

These examples of collective action are all either led by an NGO or the government, and they only address immediate resource problems. Collective action instigated by a community itself to a local state school was not identified during this research. An example of community-led collective action which was observed however, was the hiring of an Islamic teacher by a community in Niamey.[39] In a middle class area of the city, parents were reported to have come together and contributed money to pay for a *marabout* (religious leader) to give teachings on Islam to community members, both adults and children. This collective action, while still relatively small, demonstrates that where state provision of a certain type of education is lacking, parents are prepared and able to resolve the problem themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the parents in this community have the means to pay for this additional education, unlike most parents in rural communities. Moreover, parents expect the government to provide primary and secondary level education but not expect the government to provide Islamic education and so are willing to take action themselves. This in particular suggests that it is when parents do not expect the state to provide a service that they are prepared to act collectively to create one.

Emerging issues with collective action for better deployment

The examples of collective action for public education identified by this research show that collective action almost only occurs at the local level. These examples demonstrate that local communities are able to work together to address problems in public education but that these actions are limited to their specific locality and do not address the unequal distribution of teachers across the education system. Drawing together these findings on how different actors currently work together, and on their different interests and power relations, this section discusses several important barriers for collective action to improve teacher deployment and distribution.

A lack of political interest

The problem of inequitable teacher deployment and distribution is largely maintained by an absence of political motivation to improve the system and the existence of political gains from allowing teachers to transfer to schools as they wish. Political interest in improving the education sector appears to focus on the construction of schools and classrooms, while there is little attention to providing teachers for schools or raising the quality of education overall.[40] This is likely to be because the construction of classrooms and schools is very visible to voters, while improving the quality of education is unlikely to be noticed. As one interviewee commented, 'The government talks about education in their policy but if you try to hold them accountable, they don't respond. People don't see the real problems which need to be solved.'[41] Likewise, another interviewee described political pressure leading to the construction of schools without a focus on the provision or training of teachers. Comments such as 'I established a new school. I increase my popularity even if I don't ensure the proper functioning of the school', echo this understanding of the political incentive to create schools without needing to solve the more difficult problem of school staffing.

Improving the distribution of teachers across schools in Niger also carries political risks. Teachers constitute

---

35 Interviews with a quartier chief, Commune 2 and the director of a primary school, Commune 2

36 Interviews with a former employee of NGO, Agir, with the director of the Association pour la Promotion de l'Education Informelle, and with staff from the NGO, ONEN.

37 Interview with the director of the Association pour la Promotion de l'Education Informelle

38 « C'est difficile pour les parents de donner la priorité à l'éducation quand il y a des animaux à garder et élever. On utilise des animateurs pour sensibiliser les adultes auprès de l'importance de l'éducation et on donne du crédit ou des animaux aux parents pour les motiver d'envoyer leurs enfants à l'école. »

39 Interview with fellow local researcher and education specialist

40 Interview with former school director and now councillor for Shadakori, Maradi

41 Interview with teacher and unionist from a secondary school in Tiberi, Maradi. « Il parle de l'éducation dans leur programme mais si tu essaie de les rendre compte, ils ne repondent pas. Les gens ne voient pas les vrais problemes que le gouvernement doit resoudre. »

the majority of public sector workers and the actions of teacher unions can cause instability in Niamey and result in schools being shut while teachers strike. It is therefore politically safer for politicians to do nothing about inequitable teacher deployment than to challenge teachers' interests. Furthermore, were a politician to take the risk and be successful in improving the distribution of teachers, there would be little political gain since those who would benefit most are poor, rural communities who have relatively low political importance.

Weak interest and capacity for collective action by parents

The group who should, in theory, have the strongest motivation to intervene in the deployment of teachers are the parents of pupils whose school has a shortage of teachers. However, there are numerous reasons why parents do not act collectively to demand a resolution of this problem. Firstly, the parents and pupils who are most affected by the unequal distribution of teachers are those in rural areas who may themselves have a low level of education, may be unaware of the unequal distribution of teachers, may not have the time to lobby for more teachers, and may not have an awareness of the importance of schooling for their children.[42] As commented by a director of an NGO in Maradi, 'We have to explain the benefits of literacy to people – they don't ask for education themselves.'[43] This is likely to be because parents in rural areas are often poor and need to dedicate their time to economic activities. The director of a secondary school in Niamey supported this, commenting that 'parents' concern over feeding their families limits their participation in the running of the school.'[44] The lack of capacity of parents to engage substantively in their children's school and the urgency of other basic needs means parents do not act collectively to demand more teachers for their children's school.

Other parents, usually in urban areas, have greater means to engage in the education of their children because they themselves have benefitted from being educated, and they have more time to engage in their children's education. These parents could, in theory, put pressure on the government and politicians to improve the distribution of teachers across public schools. However, these parents are usually relatively wealthy and so choose to send their children to private schools instead which do not suffer from the problem of teacher recruitment or absenteeism. The director of a primary school in Maradi commented, 'those who are rich; school directors, teachers, they send their children to private schools but the poor can't do this.'[45] The potential power of these parents to change the system is thus lost since they can pay for a personal solution.

Other parents who cannot pay for private education but who are aware of the shortage of teachers in their children's school may react by transferring their child to another school. The local education inspection does not refuse parents' requests for their children to be transferred and the schools must accept all the pupils who are sent to them.[46] In the same way that school directors cannot control which and how many teachers are deployed to their school, neither can they control the number of pupils they receive. Yet, a school is unlikely to receive additional resources to support growing numbers of pupils because this is considered the responsibility of the school management committee and the pupils' parents.

Parents are therefore divided between those who can afford to pay for private school, those who can transfer their child to a better staffed public school, and those who do not have the means to engage in their child's education. This fragmentation of parents limits their motivation and capacity to work together to demand a solution to the inequitable distribution of teachers.

Recommendations

The analysis of the problem of teacher deployment in Niger and the exploration of the power and interests of different actors to act to resolve it suggests that collective action is unlikely to address the issue in a systemic way. While collective action may help to manage the daily running of individual schools, there are currently no collective efforts to reform the way in which teachers are distributed across public schools. Based on this understanding, two possibilities for improving teacher deployment are proposed. The first is an ambitious, long-term reform to the system of teacher deployment, while the second suggests short-term measures which could bring small improvements.

---

42 Interview with the director of the NGO, Salsani working in the Maradi region

43 « Il est nécessaire d'expliquer les avantages de l'alphabétisation aux gens – ils ne demandent pas l'instruction eux-mêmes. »

44 Interview with the director of a secondary school in Commune 5, Niamey. « Les occupations des parents à la recherche de quoi manger limite leur participation dans la gestion de l'établissement »

45 Interview with the director of a primary school in Maradi town – « Ceux qui sont riche, les directeurs, les enseignants, ils envoient leurs enfants aux écoles privées, les pauvres ne le peuvent pas »

46 Interview with the director of a secondary school in Tibiri, Maradi

1. Decentralisation of teacher recruitment, distribution, and payment to the inspection level

According to this study, a key problem is the separation of the management of the budget for paying teachers' salaries from the responsibility for an equitable distribution of teachers across the system. The result is that there are no incentives for education administrators to ensure that enough teachers are assigned to each school and nor are there incentives for senior administrators and/or politicians to impose sanctions on those who fail to ensure an equitable distribution of teachers. Consequently, teachers are able to use their personal relationships to push administrators into transferring them to their preferred school while other schools, usually in rural areas, face a shortage of staff.

To address this critical problem, the responsibility and budget for the distribution of teachers and paying their salary could be decentralised to the inspection level and teachers could be required to apply to the inspection in which they wish to work or be transferred to. Accompanying this change, each school in the inspection would need to be allocated a budget for teacher salaries according to a nationally agreed teacher-student ratio.[47] The education inspection staff, together with the school directors in the inspection area would be responsible for managing applications and appointing and paying teachers to schools in their inspection area according to need and budgetary restrictions. Critically, they would also have the power to refuse applications by teachers who wish to be transferred to their area if they do not have the budgetary capacity or need for an additional teacher. Consequently, if the inspection had control over how many teachers are employed in each of its schools, and were also responsible for paying their salaries, an inspection which is popular would not be able to over-recruit since they would not have the resources to pay the salaries of extra teachers. Teachers who are not selected to work in their inspection area of choice would be less able to use their personal contacts to obtain a transfer to another preferred inspection area if the budget of that inspection could not cover their salary. Instead, they would have to choose whether to apply to work in a less popular inspection area or pursue an alternative career.

It is recommended that teacher recruitment and salary budgets are decentralised to education inspection offices rather than directly to schools. This is to ensure that a number of people are responsible for the management of resources, not just school directors, which should reduce opportunities for personal rent-seeking and also reduce the potential administrative burden on school directors. However, responsibility for teacher recruitment and payment of salaries should be localised as far as possible since even within an inspection area, some schools will attract more teachers than others. Decentralising to the next level up (the departmental level), for example, could open greater potential for unequal distribution between schools located in more preferable areas.

This proposal evidently requires a significant reform to current practices and would likely meet opposition from teachers and from regional and central administrators. Teachers, who would no longer be able to work in the school of their choice may use their unions to protest against this, and central and regional level administrators are likely to oppose the transfer of power to the local level, citing fears of corruption. This reform also carries several risks. Firstly, the difficulty of actually paying salaries at the inspection level to teachers who do not have a bank account or who cannot easily withdraw money from a bank could pose practical problems. There is also a risk that the most competent teachers would be selected by the most popular urban inspection areas, leaving less popular inspection areas with a lower quality pool of teachers to recruit from. Furthermore, there is a risk that money could be embezzled leaving teachers with insufficient pay, or that administrators and school directors would experience political and personal pressure to recruit teachers who are have informal power within the local community. Finally, it is possible that administrators at the inspection level currently lack the skills to competently manage recruitment and payment.

Several additional measures could be considered to address the risks outlined above. Firstly, salaries could potentially be paid by mobile phone transfers.[48] However, the payment would still need to be authorised by the inspection to ensure that salaries are paid from a local budget. If teachers were paid in this way, it could also mean that teachers in rural areas would not have to travel to an urban centre to receive payment and so should reduce their absenteeism around salary time. To ensure that rural schools still have a large enough pool of teachers to select from, incentive schemes may be necessary to encourage local people to train to become teachers and to reward teachers who do take up posts in rural areas. Such schemes already exist but may need to be scaled up and inspection staff may need training in recruitment and financial management.

---

47 This ratio must be determined according to the actual available budget for teachers' salaries and the number of pupils enrolled in the education system. This would mean that if pupils transferred to another school, this school could apply for a corresponding increase in teaching staff.

48 There has been some experimentation with this by development agencies and the Ministry of Education which should be investigated to assess the feasibility of this reform further.

44 Interview with the director of a secondary school in Commune 5, Niamey. « Les occupations des parents à la recherche de quoi manger limite leur participation dans la gestion de l'établissement »

A more important consideration, however, is whether this reform would be politically feasible. The interviews[49] revealed that school directors, NGOs and education administrators consider this reform to be an important way of improving teacher distribution. In particular, the NGO 'ONEN' has been working with the Japanese Cooperation (JICA) and the government to discuss further decentralisation within the education system. However, some administrators and politicians argue that decentralisation would result in corruption at the local level and that local government lacks the necessary competency.[50]

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms would need to be developed which would be controlled by the regional and national level to ensure salaries were spent appropriately. There has been a pilot project in which resources were devolved to the commune level but corruption was detected and resources were recentralised.[51] While this may seem discouraging, it does demonstrate that regional and central government are capable of effectively monitoring resource use at the local level, and that corruption at the local level could be controlled through the threat of recentralisation which central government appears prepared to follow through on. Furthermore, some research suggests that when resources are managed at the local level, the local community can more easily see if they are distributed unfairly.[52] According to the literature, it is commonly found that when responsibility for school management and financing tasks, such as teacher recruitment, is decentralised to the local community, there are benefits for teacher accountability and performance (Birdsall et al., 2005; Chudgar et al., 2014). In general, this research and the wider literature finds that if a teacher is recruited locally, they are more likely to share similar social values and status to other community members and feel stronger incentives to perform well (Chudgar et al., 2014).[53]

Generating support for this reform from different actors who have the power and motivation to see it taken forward would be important. Based on this research, it would be important to identify administrators at the national and regional level who support the decentralisation of teacher deployment, and consult teachers' unions and the education consultation councils on the proposal. Given that it is likely that teachers would oppose the reform, proposing incentives for teachers would be important. This could include financial rewards for teachers working in rural areas, or a fast-track for contract teachers to have a permanent contract after a number of years working in a rural school. Given the fragmentation of unions, working with the two umbrella union bodies is likely to be important. Elected politicians could benefit from supporting the reform since if it resulted in more teachers in rural schools and a reduction in absenteeism, voters may associate these improvements with the current government. However, voting in Niger is heavily influenced by personal relations and clientelism[54] and so politicians may not view the reform as an effective way for increasing their popularity, especially if teacher unions oppose it.

An international donor could use its political importance to support this reform but it will be important that it has buy-in and ownership by government administrators at the national and regional level. To achieve this, the donor would need to identify individuals within the Ministry of Education who are motivated to work towards the implementation of the reform, and support them to find ways to take it forward. This would require a politically smart approach to supporting reform, in which the donor supports individuals within the Ministry, and potentially others, such as trade union members, to explore different ways of generating broader support for the reform. This may involve building alliances and finding compromises to create politically feasible, gradual changes in the education system, and will only work if individuals at all levels of the Ministry of Education are convinced of the merits of the reform.

An international donor could also use its financial resources to support the reform by covering the cost of upscaling accompanying incentive schemes and covering costs of trialling the reform as a pilot in one region of the country and evaluating its success. This initial financing could enable initial benefits to emerge which could generate greater government support for the reform which is necessary for the reform to be sustained in the long-term, and be independent of donor financing.

This recommendation is clearly complex and challenging and so would benefit from further research. A more detailed understanding of previous decentralisation attempts within the education sector in Niger would be very useful, as would a comparison of education reforms in

49 Interviews with the director of studies at the teacher training college, Maradi, with staff from the NGO 'ONEN', with education administrators in Tahoua, and with employee from the regional department for secondary education in Niamey

50 Interviews with member of parliament, staff from the NGO 'ONEN', employee from the regional department for secondary education in Niamey

51 Interview with representative from the project 'Education pour Tous'

52 Interview with employee from the regional department for secondary education in Niamey

53 Interview with the director of a primary school in Shadakori, Maradi.

54 See briefing: 'How Political Parties Engage Citizens in Niger' (McCullough et al.: 2015)

countries with similar political context and problems with teacher distribution. Furthermore, it would be important to examine more closely how the decisions made by those currently managing teacher salaries and deployment, especially the teacher deployment committees, are influenced by social relations and personal rent-seeking.[55] A better understanding of how these and other actors may be benefiting from the current system is important so that a reform proposal could be developed which does not provoke strong opposition from these actors. It would also be valuable for a donor to consult the wider literature on supporting politically smart, locally-led reform (e.g. Booth and Unsworth, 2014; Whaites et al., 2015), and problem-driven iterative adaptation (e.g. Andrews et al., 2015) to guide their approach to supporting such a public sector reform.

2. Short-term programmes to incentivise teachers to work in rural schools

Instead of, or in addition to, supporting reform to the deployment of teachers, a donor could consider a number of smaller interventions to incentivise teachers to work in rural schools. These would not address the underlying lack of accountability and sanctioning mechanisms in the distribution of teachers but could encourage more teachers to work in rural schools as long as incentives exist for them to do so. These short-term recommendations could provide immediate improvements to the problem of unequal distribution while a longer-term solution which addresses the political economy problems is developed and implemented.

Short-term support could include;

- Financing a scheme which supports people living in communities where schools have a shortage of teachers to undertake teacher training. There is an existing government programme which supports this but the programme may benefit from additional support so that it functions at scale.
- Financing schemes which rewards teachers through pay or material benefits to work in a rural school. For example, supporting the government to allow contract teachers who work in a rural school for a defined period of time to obtain a permanent teaching position at a quicker rate than usual. This may require financial support to cover the higher salary of permanent teachers compared to contract teachers. Such schemes already exists in policy but do not appear to function in reality despite high-level complaints by teacher unions.
- Reviewing existing strategies aimed at addressing teacher shortages, such as 'cours multigrades' or 'double-flux' and examining in which circumstances these strategies are effective. It may be beneficial to integrate such strategies into the reform proposal, especially where state resources for teacher salaries and incentives are limited.

---

55 Interview with staff from the NGO 'ONEN'

References

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M., 2015. Doing Problem-Driven Work (CID Working Paper No. 307). Center for International Development, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Andrews, M., 2014. Can one retell a Mozambican reform story through problem-driven iterative adaptation? WIDER Working Paper.

Bennell, P., 2004. Teacher motivation and incentives in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Knowl. Ski. Dev. Brighton.

Birdsall, N., Levine, R., Ibrahim, A., 2005. Towards universal primary education: investments, incentives, and institutions. Eur. J. Educ. 40, 337–349.

Booth, D., 2014. Aiding institutional reform in developing countries: Lessons from the Philippines on what works, what doesn't and why, Working politically in practice series. ODI, London.

Booth, D., Unsworth, S., 2014. Politically smart, locally led development.pdf.

Bourdon, J., Frölich, M., Michaelowa, K., 2010. Teacher shortages, teacher contracts and their effect on education in Africa. J. R. Stat. Soc. Ser. A Stat. Soc. 173, 93–116.

Bourdon, J., Frölich, M., Michaelowa, K., 2006. Broadening Access to Primary Education: Contract Teacher Programs and Their Impact on Education Outcomes in Africa–An Econometric Evaluation for Niger, in: Pro-Poor Growth: Issues, Policies, and Evidence, Schriften Des Vereins Für Socialpolitik. Duncker & Humblot, pp. 117–149.

Chowns, E., 2014. The political economy of community management: a study of factors influencing sustainability in Malawi's rural water supply sector. University of Birmingham.

Chudgar, A., Chandra, M., Razzaque, A., 2014. Alternative forms of teacher hiring in developing countries and its implications: A review of literature. Teach. Teach. Educ. 37, 150–161. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2013.10.009

Körling, G., 2011. In search of the state: an ethnography of public service provision in urban Niger, Uppsala studies in cultural anthropology. Uppsala Univ, Uppsala.

Ministère des Enseignements Secondaires, 2014. Statistiques des Enseignements Secondaires: Annuaire Statistique 2013 - 2014.

République du Niger, 2013. Programme Sectoriel de l'Education et de la Formation (2014-2024): Document du Stratégie.

Whaites, A., Gonzalez, E., Fyson, S. and Teskey, G., 2015. A Governance Practitioner's Handbook: Alternative Ideas and Approaches, OECD, Paris.