



Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Issue Briefs from USAID's Africa Bureau
Office of Sustainable Development
Division of Human Resources and Democracy

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Introduction: Why invest, what has been done, what are the challenges, and what are the issues?

Overview: Why invest in education?

African children—the future of the continent—are rightly at the center of the development process. Their education is key to sustaining democracies, improving health, increasing per capita income, and conserving environmental resources. Education lowers infant mortality, increases longevity, reinforces democratization and political stability, decreases poverty, reduces inequality, and lowers crime rates. Educated women have fewer and healthier children and are more likely to send their children to school. The individual and social impacts of these gains are essential to countries' strong economic growth. Indeed, primary education may be the highest yielding investment a country can make, as the economic growth generated by investment in education enables societies to make further educational investments, thus creating a virtuous spiral that reinforces and deepens the benefits. When the benefits of education are realized in Africa, the resulting higher wages and productivity will increase the demand for goods and services and lead to increased trade opportunities for the United States. On the other hand, countries that do not make this critical investment will not be able to nurture the required social capital for sustainable development; will suffer diminished economic growth, governance capacity, and health indicators; and could experience increased conflict, health crises, and other social ills.

What has been done

After their recent visit to Mali and Ghana, U.S. Congressmen Mark Green (R-Wisconsin) and Earl Pomeroy (D-N.D.) stated that “basic education programs achieve permanent, positive change.” The USAID-supported schools they visited in Mali, for example, “allowed children to have dreams that they would not have entertained in a million years, otherwise,” they said. Over the past 10 years, and with only 5 percent of the overall foreign aid budget for Africa, the USAID’s Africa Bureau—with support from the Office of Sustainable Development (AFR/SD)—has financed basic education reform programs in 11 countries: Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia. In that time, these countries have achieved strong enrollment gains and much greater equity for girls. Other accomplishments include:

- Significantly increased public expenditure on primary education
- Improved qualifications and conditions of service for teachers
- Reduced numbers of subjects taught to young children
- Increased decisionmaking authority and resources devolved to local and regional levels
- Improved education management information systems

Whereas increased access to education, “education for all,” is very important, AFR/SD has also worked to improve educational quality at the school and classroom levels, a process that AFR/SD has learned requires the involvement of parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers. With AFR/SD’s technical support, USAID missions have generated a sea change in attitude with regard to community participation in education. And missions have helped develop new, inductive curricula that teach African children how to probe, question, think, and solve problems.

AFR/SD’s basic education team advocates the “education sector support,” or ESS approach, which:

- *Promotes systemic reform* rather than isolated projects (assisting missions to develop strategic, progressive, long-term, analytical, and context specific approaches for strengthening the education sector)

- *Assures sustainability*, so that countries have the financial and institutional capacity to maintain and build upon their achievements
- *Develops effective, quality schools and classrooms*, measuring the results of overall reform efforts by whether and how much children learn

AFR/SD has developed a comprehensive set of tools and techniques for policy analysis, dialogue, and communication to help strengthen countries' capacity to analyze and formulate educational policies and implement reforms. Using the ESS approach, missions have made girls' education a top priority of the international agenda. Before his trip to Africa, Congressman Green had been skeptical about girls' education because as a teacher in Kenya in the 1980s, he had seen for himself how cultural bias overwhelmed efforts to provide girls with a basic education. In Mali, however, he saw USAID-supported, community-school classrooms with nearly equal numbers of girls and boys and teachers who had been trained to make these classrooms "girl-friendly."

In another example of the ESS approach, USAID missions, with the help of international private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), promote community participation by strengthening parent associations. These activities foster greater civic responsibility, which, in turn, builds social capital—promoting democratic practices and transparent governance. Parents gain a forum to express their ideas and advocate for education in their communities. Parent associations now monitor local school expenditures and teacher attendance and provide effective oversight of many school operations. In some cases, they manage supplemental budgets for school expansion or improvement.

Challenges

The *HIV/AIDS pandemic* threatens to undermine much of what has been accomplished over the past decade. HIV/AIDS increases teacher absenteeism and attrition through illness. It decreases families' ability to pay school fees. And it erodes the process and quality of education by decimating the ranks of managers, curriculum designers, planners, and administrators. In some countries, the socioeconomic changes brought about by HIV/AIDS are so pronounced that education service delivery systems face total collapse.

Quality improvements have not, generally, kept pace with increases in access. As school fees are reduced or eliminated, national budgets are hard pressed to keep up with the costs of educating burgeoning school-age populations, e.g., additional classrooms and qualified, trained teachers. Despite improvements in many countries, quality remains uneven, and the average time needed to complete each cycle of education is increasing. Although girls are enrolling in greater numbers, they remain likelier than boys to drop out.

Another difficult aspect of the access-quality nexus is *assessing* whether quality learning is indeed taking place. Most indicators of quality such as class size and per capita budget expenditure are really "proxy" measures, and in only a few instances has student achievement been directly assessed. AFR/SD will provide encouragement and support to missions to review student assessment in two ways: 1) national assessments that appraise the performance of all or part of the education system so that schools can be held accountable for results, and 2) continuous classroom assessment that enables teachers to monitor student performance.

AFR/SD will continue focusing its work with missions and multilateral partners on *systemic policy reform* as an integral and fundamental element of the ESS approach. It will also redouble efforts to assist governments in the *implementation of reformed policies* through the selective employment of

inducements, capacity building, mandates, transfer of authority, and dialogue. One type of inducement that has been very effective in some countries, for example, is nonproject assistance, or NPA.¹ However, since NPA is not always available, and in some cases undesirable, missions should seek other effective ways to enter into policy dialogue and effect reforms.

The future

The AFR/SD education team functions within a highly structured and focused framework. Resources for international development, and for education in particular, will certainly be limited. Although there are clear justifications for investing in many new subsectors, *the strengthening of basic education in Africa will continue to be the education team's highest priority*. Yet AFR/SD recognizes that conditions and priorities change, and as supplemental resources become available, the team is prepared to work in new directions with missions. To this end, the team has prepared this series of 15 issue briefs that fall into the four broad categories of:

- Who the AFR/SD education team is and why its work is so important
- Work that relates closely to what the team is now doing
- New areas that will likely require increased attention
- Emerging issues or subsectors with which the team may choose to become involved

Who the AFR/SD education team is and why its work is so important

1. The first brief describes the *organization, personnel, and functions* of AFR/SD's education team. The team comprises technical personnel with vast expertise in all areas of the education sector. The team's work is "demand driven," responding to requests for technical support to USAID's missions in Africa, research and analytical support to Africa missions and Africa Bureau staff in Washington, and donor coordination.
2. The brief on the *social and economic returns to education* outlines the relationships between investment in education and the social and economic outcomes.

Work that relates closely to what the team is now doing

3. The brief on *community involvement in education* outlines the importance of broadening local involvement in schools. Increased parental and community involvement leads to higher girls' enrollments and improved quality.
4. For over a decade, USAID and AFR/SD in particular have made support of *girls' education* a priority. By making education more "girl-friendly," all students, including boys, benefit. Still, despite the high returns to investing in girls' education, fewer than half of girls in sub-Saharan Africa enter primary school, and of those who do, fewer than half reach fifth grade.
5. AFR/SD puts heavy emphasis upon strategic, systemic, and long term *policy reform*. The challenge will be to sustain the gains in access, equity, quality, and efficiency made possible over the past decade.
6. It makes little sense to create access to education for all if learning does not take place. Despite the progress that has been made over the past decade, the sad truth is that most classrooms fail to create good *quality learning conditions*, and there is growing awareness that governments cannot currently provide quality education for all children. The challenge for missions is to integrate the political agenda of education for all with the educational agenda of maintaining high quality of learning.

¹ NPA refers to the donor or lender practice of providing direct budgetary support to finance and education ministries in exchange for their agreement to undertake specific reforms.

7. There is a crisis in the *quality of teaching*. As enrollments increase, countries have been unable to supply sufficient numbers of qualified teachers due to inadequate budgets, poor pay, inadequate teacher development infrastructure, and other longstanding issues.

New areas that will likely require increased attention

8. Throughout the 1990s, education reform in Africa focused on increasing enrollment; increasingly, countries are focused on maintaining and improving the quality of learning. To do so, they must be able to measure how much learning is taking place. The brief on *assessing student learning* outlines two ways to assess school and student performance.
9. The *HIV-AIDS epidemic* represents a serious challenge to education throughout Africa, threatening to undermine much of the progress that education ministries have made over the past decade. AFR/SD is putting forward a three-pronged strategy: 1) a mobile task team that provides technical assistance to missions, 2) coordination with other partners; and 3) research, dissemination, and advocacy.
10. New *partnership* forces are emerging out of young democracies and free-market economies. Faced with staff and resource shortages, AFR/SD will strengthen existing partnerships and foster new ones. Whereas in the past USAID emphasized grassroots partnerships, it will now also look to the “grass-tops” as well, leveraging stakeholders at all levels.
11. Knowledge is rapidly replacing raw materials and labor in developed countries, and the “digital divide” continues to grow. Where teaching resources are thin or populations inaccessible, distance learning and educational radio can supplement or provide alternative means of delivering formal or nonformal education. Since *technology interventions* tend to be expensive, planning for technology education is opportunistic.

Emerging issues or subsectors with which the team may choose to become involved

12. The ability of African nations to achieve or maintain a competitive niche in the global market may be constrained by an imbalance between their populations’ skills and the skills required by various industries. For this reason, increasing numbers of missions may engage in *youth and workforce development*. The education team outlines two major approaches: developing workplace foundation skills for children in school, and treating workforce development as part of a larger strategy of improving the economic competitiveness of industry clusters.
13. Assisting *countries in crisis* presents a serious challenge. Government infrastructure is often weak or nonexistent, which compromises the sustainability of potential activities. Yet education can be of help in reviving and expanding diminished pools of human resources as well as providing basic education to children who are victims of war or natural disaster.
14. Children lacking access to education are most likely to be engaged in labor market activity, yet in some instances, labor options provide a disincentive to education, particularly where systems are failing or education quality is poor. Most basic education programs have been unable to reach those involved in the more abusive forms of *child labor*, which will likely require better domestic legislation and more careful targeting of programs.
15. AFR/SD encourages cross-sectoral programming to improve health, nutrition, and education. In this regard, *school feeding programs* and the Global Food for Education Initiative offer an opportunity to explore these efforts and incorporate lessons of previous school feeding programs.

1. Responding to bureau and mission needs: The Africa Bureau's education team

Organization

The education team is part of the Africa Bureau's Office of Sustainable Development. The team leader reports to the Chief of the Division for Human Resource Development.

Team personnel

The team consists of technical personnel with expertise in education system and policy reform, teacher development, curriculum improvement, classroom improvement, technology in education, monitoring and evaluation, environmental education, and school health (particularly HIV/AIDS). Team members are contract personnel, U.S. Government employees on detail from other agencies, fellows, or USAID direct hire. The team leader is a USDH foreign service officer.

Team functions

The team provides the following services:

- *Technical support to USAID missions in Africa.* Team members backstop each mission, and either provide technical support directly or locate suitable expertise. This support may take the form of technical consulting to develop programs; the writing of program implementation documents, program progress reviews, and evaluations; and the provision of ongoing technical dialogue on specific topics that missions request. The team also provides periodic professional training for Africa Bureau education personnel.
- *Research and analytical support to missions and to Africa Bureau staff.* The team provides technical advice to missions and bureau management. The team is the Bureau's resource on current trends and research in education improvement.
- *Donor coordination.* The team meets regularly with other donors to ensure that USAID is up to date in understanding what other donors are doing in the education sector and making sure that donor activities are complementary and consistent.
- *Management support.* The team assists missions to locate suitable personnel to manage their education portfolios. The team provides personnel to cover missions when education personnel are absent and provides additional staffing for periods of heavy workload.

Team activities are *demand-driven*, i.e., they support mission and Africa Bureau needs as they are identified.

For more information or to request assistance from the education team contact

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2. Measuring economic returns to education

Overview

The increasing differences in the economic growth rates among countries have influenced research in the economics of education. This research has concentrated on evaluating the returns to education, i.e., assessing its contribution to national welfare and development. The research has provided guidelines for development planners working toward the objectives of:

- Measuring educational outcomes at different levels for different demographic groups
- Determining the impact of education on human resource development and economic growth at different levels of economic development
- Allocating resources more efficiently between educational levels and among economic sectors
- Evaluating alternative development strategies for sustainable economic development

Research results and lessons learned

The *social returns to education are higher at the primary and secondary level* than at the tertiary level, thus propelling politically unpopular cost-recovery efforts in higher education. Though the private returns to education are higher than the social returns at all levels of development, there remains a need for public funding of education, especially in Africa.

Education contributes to the development of social capital, facilitating communication between ethnic groups and promoting social cohesion, which in turn lowers transaction costs and reduces social tensions. The historical role of education in building social capital and creating common norms and values has been a major catalyst in the development of the public education system. In time, Africa's post-colonial investment in public education is likely to achieve similar results and lead to faster economic growth and major progress toward political stability and democracy.

Increased access to education reduces population growth. High levels of female schooling are associated with reduced fertility, low child mortality, and consequently with high per capita income growth. In fact, the overall returns to education for females are higher than for males.

The effect of education on other sectors has been especially significant in the agriculture sector, where studies have shown a positive relation between farmers' education, agricultural productivity, improved production techniques, and a consequent reduction of poverty in rural areas.

Finally, the research suggests that *alternatives to formal secondary education*, e.g., technical education or training, may have a stronger relation to productivity growth.

Challenges

These research results bolster the idea that the United States has strong strategic, economic, and geopolitical interests for investing in Africa's education. As investment in education raises private and social productivity, the required social capital for sustainable development is enhanced and nurtured. More democracy, better governance, and improved health could mean less need for foreign assistance for conflict resolution, health epidemics, and the other social ills that accompany underdevelopment. Given the high expected returns to education in Africa—including higher wages and productivity—the accompanying demand for foreign goods and services will create new market opportunities for the United States.

3. Increasing community involvement in education

Overview

Every USAID education program in sub-Saharan Africa now includes a community component, based on the belief that community participation can play an important role in improving educational quality and developing civil society. Most community members care deeply about education, and are willing to contribute to efforts to improve and expand local schools. Increased community involvement is clearly related to improved access, and there is growing evidence that community involvement also improves the quality of the education offered.

What has been done

USAID has conducted “social mobilization” programs in a number of countries.² Social mobilization campaigns have encouraged parents to send their children, especially girls, to school; others have assisted communities to recognize and overcome barriers to education.

USAID has also implemented programs that strengthen the ability of community members to have a voice in their schools, motivate them to contribute time and labor to schools, and train them in school management and oversight responsibilities. Community involvement in schools leads to appropriate solutions for local problems and increased accountability of school staff. These benefits may then spill over into other areas of community concern, thus strengthening civil society.

USAID community school programs have helped communities found new schools, a means of sharing costs in areas where national systems have been unable to meet the educational demand. In one African country, USAID-assisted community school programs now supply over 10 percent of school places.

Finally, USAID has developed two software tools. The first is a library of diversified approaches to increasing community involvement, and the second explains practical techniques for working with communities. Both tools have been widely disseminated to education ministries, universities, NGOs, and donors.

Challenges

- Most community involvement programs are pilot activities carried out in a limited number of communities. Attempts to “scale up” community involvement activities have often become mechanical and lost the essential quality that made the programs successful. New strategies for expanding programs, either through replication or incorporation into existing systems, need to be explored.
- Community enthusiasm for supporting schools often evaporates after externally funded programs supplying leadership and materials end. New techniques are needed to build sustainability into programs and teach community members the skills needed to look for support both within and outside their communities.
- If the strengthening of community capacity to support and manage their own schools is to be translated into strengthened civil society, such linkages need to be encouraged from the start.

² According to UNDP, community mobilization refers to community involvement in all phases of a development-related activity, including planning, design, implementation, and benefit sharing.

4. Promoting girls' education

Overview

Influenced by numerous studies that show large public and private returns on investments in girls' education, USAID has prioritized support for girls' primary education and for making education more "child friendly." Educated women earn more, have smaller, healthier families, and are more likely to educate their girls. Moreover, interventions that target girls help boys as well. Despite the benefits, fewer than half of girls in sub-Saharan Africa enter primary school, and of those who do, fewer than half reach fifth grade. The largest return to education is gained when girls complete the primary level. Retention, therefore, is key. USAID has learned that a focus on girls' education must include a parallel focus on quality, i.e., an environment must be created to keep girls in school.

What has been done

Assisting in the analysis and development of *policy frameworks*, USAID works with partner governments to remove constraints to girls' education. USAID has been instrumental in school mapping, the disaggregation of data by gender, greater focus on attendance rather than enrollment rates, changes in policies barring pregnant girls or mothers from school, and the provision of incentives for sending girls to school.

Support to regional institutions such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists has brought increased public and ministerial attention to the issue of girls' education.

The *physical condition of schools* has been improved and the number of spaces for school-going children has increased. Efforts have concentrated on building more schools, improving their facilities, and making them more child friendly. Activities have included community involvement in improving school environments and monitoring and managing school affairs.

Girl-friendly interventions have been introduced at the school and community level. Examples include scholarship programs, curriculum redesign, recruitment of female teachers, development of alternative forms of delivering education, and investment in labor-saving devices (such as wells) at schools. Building schools closer to girls' homes and providing clean and private lavatory facilities often make a difference in retaining girls. Recognizing the power of parents and community members in determining whether a girl goes to school, many of the above interventions are combined with community-level girls' education advocacy campaigns and mobilization activities.

Challenges

- Girls and boys are more likely to stay in school if they are provided quality education in the best learning environment possible. To improve retention, it is necessary to continue to focus on improving facilities, student/teacher ratios, teacher training, and recruitment of female teachers. Teacher training should stress the need for gender-neutral teaching. Community involvement to improve schools and learning and address barriers preventing girls from staying in school also remains a priority.
- *The HIV/AIDS epidemic has changed the educational landscape dramatically.* Safety issues for girls, in particular, must be addressed, as some schools are risk environments for infection. Schools may be used to deliver critical prevention messages, and they may be called on to take on other development activities, such as food distribution, health and nutrition interventions, and care and education of the growing number of orphans. The role of the school in providing vocational or livelihood training, particularly for girls, must be reexamined given economic pressures and the human capacity losses being experienced in areas hit by the epidemic.

5. Supporting policy reform

Overview

Because policy reform leads to reallocating resources, revamping education services, reorganizing service delivery, and reassigning authority and responsibilities, USAID has made it an integral part of its work in the education sector for many years.

What has been done

Since the early 1990s, virtually all USAID basic education programs have adopted a policy-based approach to education reform. USAID-supported policy reforms have led to increased public expenditures for basic education; improved qualifications and conditions of service for teachers; reductions in the number of subjects taught to young primary school children; improved primary school curricula; devolution of authority, responsibility, and resources to local and regional levels; improved education management information systems; increased participation of communities, parents, and NGOs; and improved access to education, especially for girls and rural children. Using policy analysis, policy dialogue, and financial incentives, USAID has leveraged these important reforms. Building on its successes and lessons, AFR/SD's education team has developed a comprehensive set of tools and techniques for policy analysis, dialogue, and communication to help improve a country's capacity to formulate and implement sound education policies.

Challenges

Much work remains to be done if policy reform is to make a lasting impact on schools and education systems. Recently, countries have been announcing major policy reforms, such as universal basic education, without first undertaking the necessary planning and analysis to support them. This has constrained some education systems from providing adequate school facilities, trained teachers, and learning materials. While production of education statistics has improved, most countries have not made use of this information for policy analysis, formulation, and implementation.

One way to promote policy reform has been “nonproject assistance,” or NPA, which provides budgetary support to help overcome the costs associated with policy initiatives. The experience with NPA as a lever for policy reform has been mixed. In some cases, national education systems have not had the leadership or institutional capacity to effectively manage a policy reform program. In others, conditionalities have been too onerous and did not have the support of government leaders. Missions that have effectively used NPA to support the management of policy reform have engaged government officials and key stakeholders in substantive and ongoing policy dialogue, analysis, and reviews of implementation.

Budgetary support is increasingly used by other development partners to develop and support sector investment plans. USAID's strength is providing technical assistance in this process, and AFR/SD has developed a number of strategies and tools to use in developing these plans. If the circumstances are right, the education team advocates the use of NPA in combination with technical assistance, particularly in countries where there is budgetary support for sector investment plans provided by a number of donor agencies. Another promising avenue is continued support and collaboration with organizations such as ADEA³ that bring African education ministries together with development partners to engage in policy dialogue and analysis.

³ The Association for the Development of Education in Africa, an organization of African education ministries and donors.

6. Improving educational quality

Overview

USAID has played a central role in leading the discussion in developing countries, not only to define what quality in education means, but also to identify approaches that lead to quality improvements and enhanced student learning. However, despite all the discussion, the reality is that most classrooms in developing countries still fail to create good quality learning conditions. Additionally, there is growing awareness that governments cannot supply quality education for their burgeoning school-age populations. Therefore, parents and other stakeholders must take more responsibility for providing alternative opportunities for their children to gain basic skills.

Definitions of quality are not fixed, but rather evolve as conditions change. Thus, any discussion of quality or action to improve quality must be preceded by an understanding of the learning experiences of individual pupils. Definitions of quality are also determined at the country level: countries determine the relationship between their own quality standards and “internationally accepted” definitions. Again, efforts to define quality and improve learning must be gauged at the school and classroom level and involve ongoing systematic assessment.

What has been done

- *Ongoing research* on quality, particularly at the school and classroom level. This research has provided valuable insight into changes that are needed in policy, programs, and practice
- *Curriculum development* to improve cultural sensitivity and learning pedagogy, and child-centered methodologies that introduce skill-based competencies
- *Development of instructional materials* and improved textbooks that incorporate more active learning and sequenced learning objectives
- *Improved teacher preparation* and ongoing professional development of teachers
- *New methodologies to assess pupil proficiency* and teacher pedagogical skills
- *Introduction of educational data* for policymakers to use for planning and programming
- *Broader stakeholder participation*—NGOs, parents, teachers, school directors, and specialists in educational research networks—in research, discussion of quality and learning, and development of alternative approaches

Challenges

- Efforts to increase access press systems to maintain, let alone enhance, educational quality. This creates a misalignment between the political and educational agendas. The political agenda is to provide free access to increasing numbers of children, while the educational agenda is to maintain the quality of learning.
- Language of instruction continues to be a complex issue. Efforts to reconcile use of former colonial languages with a variety of indigenous languages in ways that respect cultural identity and improve student learning have yet to be resolved.
- Experience suggests that technology can serve a useful role as an instructional medium. Ways to leverage this effectively and ensure that the substance of what is shared through technology is of value remains a critical need.
- There is a tremendous need for more focus on assessment. Many countries have placed high priority on norm-referenced tests that function to limit access to higher levels of education. Efforts to improve quality demand more “authentic” forms of assessment, e.g., curriculum-based tests, continuous assessment, and more holistic classroom-based and teacher-made testing procedures that can better measure what students are learning.

7. Strengthening teacher development

Overview

Universal access to quality primary education is a priority of all African countries. The movement toward universal access places enormous stress on overburdened education systems, and recruiting, training, and supporting enough teachers to provide quality learning environments is particularly challenging. However, while the success of educational reform efforts depends on teachers, they typically receive only limited preparation and ongoing professional support. Teachers, the keystone of the educational system, on the whole have not fully mastered their subject content, have little training on creative ways to engage pupils in learning, are barely able to survive on their meager salaries, face more pupils than their classrooms can adequately hold, live several miles from their schools, do not speak the same language as their pupils, are periodically “inspected” for administrative compliance rather than instructional guidance, and are devastated by HIV/AIDS, either within their own families or their work environment. Clearly, there is a crisis in the quality of teaching in primary school.

What has been done

The professional development of teachers is receiving increasing attention from policymakers. For example, reforms have been introduced that provide incentives; provide additional training and ongoing support through the establishment of inservice and regional centers; reframe site-based training to focus on learner-centered activities; increase distance learning opportunities; and redefine head teacher and inspectorate roles to strengthen instructional support. Teachers are beginning to participate in dialogue about strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning and are carrying out “action” research. Their voices are beginning to be heard.

Challenges

Long-term programs for the teaching profession must be strengthened to address long-standing issues that weaken the quality of teaching. Some examples follow.

- Many individuals are recruited to fill “emergency” teaching slots. These individuals lack formal credentials and have little hope of reducing this gap unless there is a mutual commitment between the system and the individual for potential long-term employment.
- Teachers are on the move—often from one class or school to another, transfers due to a spouse relocation, or absenteeism due to personal or family illness. The quality of the learning is critically influenced by both teacher absenteeism and transfer.
- The quality of teaching suffers when teachers do not speak the language of their pupils, cannot read the instructional manuals, do not receive training for new curricula, do not know enough about content to teach, or have scant training in pedagogical methods.
- The impact of HIV/AIDS reaches beyond personal illness to include caring for family members, death of a spouse, adoption of orphaned children, adjusting to absence of professional colleagues in school, and reduced family income.
- Teachers join the system through a variety of mechanisms—community support, government employment, and temporary contracts—with differing salaries, benefits, and incentives for immediate and permanent participation.
- Generalities are typically used to describe problems or issues, e.g., high absenteeism and unqualified teachers, but concrete knowledge is required to accurately pinpoint policy targets and program interventions.
- Teachers are a critical variable in the quality of teaching and learning. Teacher development is a continuum that begins with preparation of new recruits with instructional skills and content knowledge and continues with ongoing professional training and support.

8. Assessing student learning

Overview

The focus on getting African children into school has recently expanded to ensure that the quality of their school experience improves (or at least does not decline) as enrollments expand. But how do we know that children are actually learning the intended curriculum and that education reforms are leading to improved learning? The answer is assessment. Assessment may take many forms, and the type of instrument chosen depends on the type of questions we are trying to answer.⁴ AFR/SD recommends a focus on two interrelated assessment activities: *national level assessment* and *continuous assessment* in the classroom.

A national assessment assesses the performance of all or part of the education system. Is learning improving nationwide? How is learning associated with other school characteristics such as student-teacher ratios? National assessments measure learning with student testing, but scores are analyzed and reported at the group level, e.g., school or region, rather than the individual level. National assessments are typically administered every few years to a sample of students in core subjects only. National assessments can be used to hold schools “accountable” for using their resources well, *but their ability to affect individual student learning is neither direct nor immediate.*

Continuous assessment refers to regular activities undertaken by teachers in the classroom to monitor how well students understand lessons or master concepts. The teachers then continuously “feed back” this information into the learning and teaching process. Continuous assessment methods typically include periodic classroom tests and quizzes and informal, observational techniques to render an authentic portrait of what students actually know.

What has been done

In the early 1990s, USAID’s Africa Bureau began an activity to help ministry officials responsible for student testing programs to improve those tests, bringing together representatives from African examinations councils of a number of countries and regions. The project foundered, however, on a disagreement over whether to focus on exams or on the entire instructional system (exams, curricula, materials, teacher training). In 1999, AFR/SD inventoried testing and assessment activities in African countries with USAID education activities and is now updating the inventory.

Challenges

While more research is necessary, existing knowledge of testing and assessment is sufficient to allow us to prioritize assessment activities in the following broad categories:

- Encourage missions, ministries, and donors to focus on development of a national continuous assessment system, including a national strategy for continuous assessment (which would include a comprehensive plan for the use of results) and training teachers in its implementation.
- Work with missions, education ministries, and donors to strengthen national systems of student assessment and to use the results to monitor educational quality.
- Testing and assessment are vital to monitoring and improving educational quality. Some assessment activities can even impede improved quality. We must begin making assessment an integral part of overall education reform efforts.

⁴ National and continuous assessment activities are *not* school-leaving or selection exams that serve as gatekeepers for limited secondary school places.

9. Responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic

Overview

The HIV/AIDS epidemic represents a serious challenge to education systems throughout Africa. High prevalence countries in southern and eastern Africa face high teacher losses, increasing numbers of pupils without adequate financial support, and a growing number of children who drop out of school to care for younger siblings or ill relatives. For children who do attend school, educational quality may be in decline because of lack of teachers due to mortality, morbidity, and absenteeism to care for sick relatives and attend funerals. HIV/AIDS threatens to undermine the progress that many education ministries have made in the past decade to improve teacher training and supervision, teacher/pupil ratios, the quality and relevance of curricula, the availability of textbooks, the quality of education management information systems, the efficiency of administration, and access to education for all, especially girls.

What has been done

First, AFR/SD has developed a strategy for addressing HIV/AIDS and education through capacity strengthening, life-skills education in the classroom, and delivering innovative educational opportunities to children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. For example, AFR/SD formed a Mobile Task Team based at the University of Natal, South Africa. The MTT works with education ministries and missions to develop strategic and implementation plans to manage the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems. The AFR/SD education team also assists missions to incorporate HIV activities into their education frameworks, coordinates mission/ministry activities with the MTT, facilitates funding from other sources for HIV activities, and develops indicators to monitor HIV and education outcomes.

Second, the education team collaborates with partners on intra-agency HIV/AIDS and education issues and provides input to USAID's Global and other bureaus as well as within the Africa Bureau. The team provides leadership to the Inter-Agency Working Group on HIV/AIDS and Education.

Finally, AFR/SD's education team is involved in research on the management and mitigation of teacher losses, classroom-level HIV prevention activities, and strategies for addressing the educational needs of orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS. The team will coordinate this research with two planned clearinghouses, one focusing on HIV prevention education at the International Bureau for Education, the other devoted to HIV impact management studies at the International Institute for Educational Planning.

Challenges

- Strengthening central education ministry capacity for long-term strategic planning and management of the impacts of HIV in the education workforce, and among pupils
- Strengthening classroom-based life-skills education and HIV prevention
- Supporting education ministries and NGOs in innovative delivery of basic education to orphans and vulnerable children, with a special focus on HIV prevention, community mobilization, and girls' education

10. Strengthening and expanding partnerships

Overview

The effective political, economic, and social weight of African civil society organizations, of international and local NGOs, PVOs, religious organizations, regional networks, as well as the emergence of the private sector and U.S. business community's interest in development has expanded the scope and outreach of partnering strategies. AFR/SD needs to strengthen existing partnerships and foster new ones because of their many advantages. For example, partnerships can help sustain USAID's sectoral approach by:

- Fostering working relationships between agencies, governments, and civil society
- Establishing a foundation for an educated workforce to support economic competitiveness
- Attracting and mobilizing resources for change
- Maximizing impact on communities through alternative forms of education
- Increasing transparency and accountability

What has been done

New types of donor coordination such as coordinated planning and funding, program reviews, and policy dialogue and advocacy have improved programmatic, funding, and planning strategies. Partnerships with regional African professional networks such as ADEA, FAWE, ERNWACA, and ERNESA⁵ provide channels for policy dialogue and information exchange. Partnerships with the private sector have opened up opportunities for information technologies to support basic and higher education programs, school rehabilitation, and science teaching. International and local NGOs and PVOs provide community schooling and strengthen civil society's capacity to deliver and manage education services. New partnerships between African and U.S. universities improve teacher training, distance learning capacity and quality, and provide scholarships. USAID and civil society partnerships are based on synergies between education and democracy and governance programs, providing literacy, democracy, and civic education training to women, journalists, and federations of parent-teacher associations.

Challenges

- While associating with new and old nongovernmental partners is key, support for bilateral partnerships to lead to system-wide change remains a priority.
- Recent experience shows that strengthening NGOs, the private sector, and civil society helps improve education systems.
- AFR/SD's role is to represent the missions' interests and "broker" their support of new mechanisms for collaborating with the private sector. Thus, missions should lead the way in identifying and sustaining the most effective country-specific partnerships.
- Types and scopes of partnership with the private sector need to be explored in collaboration with missions. Guiding principles must be developed, particularly to address ethical issues, procurement regulations, and to respect workers' rights.
- New mechanisms for financing education such as grants, matching funds with private sector contributions, and for-profit and non-profit schemes, need to be further explored.
- Issues related to the management of partnerships, such as balance of power and responsibilities between partners, need exploration.

⁵ ADEA: Association for the Development of Education in Africa; FAWE: Forum for African Women Educationalists; ERNWACA/ERNESA: Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa/Eastern and Southern Africa.

11. Incorporating technology

Overview

Without the integration of technology into daily life, Africa's children will continue to underperform in the global context. Therefore, those coordinating education activities at all levels should not only plan to provide access to information and communication technologies, but ensure that they are appropriately applied to enhance learning quality.

What has been done

Where teaching resources are thin or populations inaccessible, *distance learning and educational radio* provide alternative means of delivering formal and nonformal education. Interactive radio can reach displaced populations, giving children a sense of normalcy and continuity. Radio can deliver language, math, and life-skills curricula to nomadic populations or provide instruction to children orphaned by AIDS. Radio programs are currently being developed to augment teacher effectiveness as their ranks are affected by the HIV-AIDS pandemic.

Community learning centers harness technology in support of education by giving in- and out-of-school youth—along with teachers, parents, and civil society groups—access to computer training, the Internet and other information, education, and communications technologies. Models vary, but commonly centers are made sustainable through the provision of fee-based services such as printing, word processing, or faxing, with time set aside for no-cost services and training freely accessible by the community.

Finally, the introduction of computers into schools and teacher training facilities is giving learners unprecedented access to current technology and opportunity. With USAID assistance, teachers are benefiting from *computer and web-based approaches to learning*.

Challenges

Planning for technology is opportunistic. As start-up investments for infrastructure and hardware can be expensive, the challenge becomes developing cost-sharing, multi-use, and multisectoral implementation strategies for implementation. Creative approaches might include the following:

- *Within missions*, strategic objective teams can pool resources to support centers where communities can gain access to information or attend topical sessions on such topics as improved farming techniques, voting procedures, microenterprise development, literacy training, family health, or HIV-AIDS awareness.
- *Project grantees and implementers* can utilize existing infrastructure, such as recording studios, for the production of radio programs (rather than investing in new space).
- *Communities* can work with the private sector to leverage support for learning centers and secure discounted hardware, software, or Internet service provider rates.
- *Private industry* can develop new markets for information and communications technologies and offer discounted rates to schools and community groups.
- *Across governments*, bilateral and multilateral partners can maximize their investments by coordinating large investments in infrastructure, training, and system maintenance.
- *Development specialists, educators, and policymakers* can continually ask the question, Technology for what? Technology that is meaningful in the education sector should lend itself to increased learner competencies, labor market competitiveness, and enable increased social and economic wellbeing.

12. Preparing youth for the workforce

Overview

In sub-Saharan Africa, half the eligible school age population is not enrolled, and fewer than half of those who are complete the primary school cycle. Unemployment and underemployment are causing crime and social problems. In many countries, the workforce is being decimated by HIV/AIDS and thousands of children are being orphaned by the disease and leaving school. Youth and workforce development are emerging, critical issues in sub-Saharan Africa. The ability of African nations to gain or maintain a competitive market niche is often constrained by the inadequacy of available skills to match labor market demand. Universal primary education policies have paid high dividends; nevertheless, they have also produced a more capable labor force with greater expectations but little skill focus and limited employability. In short, the gap between basic skills and labor market needs continues to widen.

What has been done

There is increasing interest in youth and workforce development. One country has launched a comprehensive program for youth, including basic skills training, and other countries have shown interest in developing youth and workforce development objectives. In one country, businesses within each industry sector are taxed to provide training resources, which are managed by stakeholder-led sector education and training authorities. While basic education remains the AFR/SD education team's highest priority, it will devote increasing attention to sharpening the relevance of skills necessary for economic and social development—as appropriate to local circumstances and subject to market demand.

Challenges

There are two major approaches to youth and workforce development. First is the development of *workplace foundations skills* for children in school, and *nonformal education* for at-risk children outside of schools. In these programs, all children should learn basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, and listening), critical thinking skills (ability to learn, reason, think creatively, make decisions, and solve problems), personal qualities (individual responsibility, self-esteem and self management, sociability, and integrity), and employment skills (ability to identify and then navigate the culture of different workplaces).

A second approach, which would be closely associated with the work of the economic growth teams in USAID missions and with the Global Bureau's Center for Human Capacity Development, would *treat workforce development as part of a larger strategy* of improving the economic competitiveness of an industry cluster (tourism, agribusiness, mining, etc). A cluster would consist of the demand side (employers and suppliers relevant to the cluster) and the supply side (education/training suppliers such as schools, training organizations, and universities). The education and training needs of microenterprise will also be addressed so that they could evolve into small business and create further employment.

13. Assisting countries in crisis

Overview

While there are different definitions of crisis, most include armed conflicts (including pre- and post-conflict stages), natural disasters, pandemics, and government failures. Using these broad definitions, it is safe to say that a majority of African countries are currently enduring some type of crisis. Millions of African children are affected by crisis—they are refugees, internally displaced, soldiers or ex-soldiers, victims of rape, landmines, or other atrocities, HIV/AIDS infected, or orphaned. They may be unable to attend school for all these reasons, or because the education system itself has collapsed. USAID has several offices addressing a wide variety of crisis issues, including the Bureau for Humanitarian Response’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Office of Transition Initiatives, the Africa Bureau’s Crisis Mitigation and Recovery Division, and the Global Bureau. USAID has not included education among its priorities for countries in crisis, but it is clear that education can be of great help in reviving and expanding diminished pools of human resources, preventing conflict from flaring up, promoting stability, and rebuilding education systems. In 1999, the AFR/SD education team researched and synthesized information and lessons learned on the types of programs and interventions currently undertaken by international organizations, agencies, and NGOs in education in countries in crisis. This research could serve as a starting point for discussion of the role USAID might play if it decided to enter the arena.

What has been done

AFR/SD has focused on strengthening existing education systems, introducing systemic reform, sustaining dialogue and partnership with governments and donors, and promoting community participation through NGOs. Except for HIV/AIDS, the education team has not yet directly addressed crisis situations. Based on their knowledge of what works in pre-crisis and post-crisis situations, practitioners have suggested that because of its experience in the education sector USAID would be most helpful in the following areas:

- Restructuring teaching services to help “normalize” children’s lives
- Supplying paraprofessionals with intensive short-term training to teach children
- Reconstructing curricula to include conflict resolution and peace education; supporting the development of related educational materials
- Using crisis as an opportunity to “do things differently,” such as introducing child-centered teaching approaches

Challenges

AFR/SD’s education team needs to define its position on how it will work in crisis countries. Among the possibilities AFR/SD should explore are:

- Helping countries where USAID has bilateral programs deal with the effects of crisis on both internally and externally displaced people
- Gathering information, conducting policy dialogue, analyzing research, and assessing needs
- Teaching youth skills in conjunction with basic education
- Forming partnerships with others already working in the field

14. Combating child labor

Overview

Approximately one-third of African children ages 10 to 14 are engaged in some form of full-time labor market activity, including petty trade, light manufacturing, or farming. How many are involved in abusive forms of child labor is more difficult to determine: these practices may be underground, or the children most affected may go uncounted in national censuses and school mapping exercises, as they are often abandoned or orphaned. The worst forms of child labor include slavery and trafficking, prostitution and pornography, illicit activities such as drug trade, and work that by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out threatens children's health, safety, or welfare. Those children lacking access to education are most likely to engage in both forms of labor market activity. Yet in some instances, labor options provide strong disincentives to education, particularly where systems are failing or quality is poor.

AFR/SD has argued that improving existing basic education programs will reduce child labor. While this may be true for certain types of child labor, children involved in more abusive forms are unlikely to be affected by traditional basic education programs, where the majority of USAID's education support is directed. "Education for all" has become a rallying cry, but the sad fact is that the most hidden groups of child learners are often the last to be reached.

What has been done

The international community has made great strides in bringing the issue of child labor to the policy forefront. Since 1995, the United States has allocated \$112 million to the International Labor Organization's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC) and provided funding to U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to combat child labor. This year ILO-IPEC received \$45 million and DOL an additional \$37 million to compliment ILO's work in a new basic education and abusive child labor initiative.

Challenges

- Child labor, abusive or otherwise, is related to poverty. Access to basic education is an important step in its alleviation, yet education alone is not enough. Internal capacity to recognize the corrosive effects of child labor practices must be strengthened through policy dialogue and the strengthening of civil society. Additionally, the central tenets of international conventions must be reflected upon and enforced in domestic legislation and reform efforts.
- Children engaged in abusive forms of labor are often the most hidden in a society. Developing interventions that not only respond to the needs of these children, but are also capable of locating other targeted populations—such as orphans, demobilized soldiers and child fighters, and child slaves, prostitutes, and traffickers—and providing services of immediate value are essential.
- Educational reform is long-term. Meaningful results, i.e., increased enrollment, retention, and quality learning are appropriately measured in decades rather than years. The long-term view requires vigilance to stay the course while responding to new initiatives and political imperatives.

15. Exploring the benefits of school feeding

Overview

The AFR/SD education team supports the principle of cross-sectoral programming to improve health, nutrition, and education in developing countries. School feeding programs and the Global Food for Education Initiative (GFEI) present opportunities to explore this idea, particularly the use of food to benefit children and their families. However, school feeding programs have not always achieved their intended nutritional and educational objectives. Indeed, the impact of food aid on the education of individuals—and education reform in general—is unclear. It is thus helpful to revisit USAID’s experience and findings regarding these programs.

The literature on school feeding programs in Africa suggests three main implementation issues. First, the poorest areas where food supplementation programs may be most needed may be the same areas where the programs are least likely to be effective. In fact, there may be no school for children to attend. Other needy, vulnerable groups such as orphans and those affected by HIV/AIDs may be similarly disadvantaged, because there is no infrastructure to reach them and they are less likely to be attending school.

Second, though the benefits of school feeding programs may appear obvious, in the African context there is little evidence that these efforts contribute either to the nutritional wellbeing or learning outcomes of children who take part.

Finally, school feeding programs are not easily sustained. For the foreseeable future, the provision of food to students should complement other reform priorities, but not be a priority itself.

What has been done

AFR/SD drafted a memo to the Bureau for Humanitarian Response laying out its position on school feeding and the GFEI. In 2000, the team led a school feeding/food for education stakeholders’ meeting to share observations and experience about best practices in the design and implementation of school feeding programs, especially in Africa, and to identify ways to make food aid “work” to benefit the children’s learning. Finally, AFR/SD assisted the Africa Bureau to review GFEI proposals using criteria developed in the stakeholders meeting.

Challenges

- School feeding should take place within the context of broad, national school reform programs.
- Education ministries should not be encouraged to “take on” school feeding at the expense of other educational inputs.
- Some portion of food commodities should be monetized with the proceeds used for implementation of the program and other programmatic inputs.
- Communities should be involved in a substantive way in planning and implementing programs.
- There should be a focus on complementary health inputs to accompany the school feeding.
- There should be an exit strategy.
- Programs should be targeted to reach the most needy/vulnerable populations (including those impacted by HIV/AIDs).
- Innovative approaches should be encouraged and tested.