

**Association for the Development of African Education**

# **Formulating Educational Policy in sub-Saharan Africa**

**A working paper for discussion at the DAE's  
1995 Biennial Plenary Meeting**

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This working paper for the DAE's 1995 Biennial Plenary Meeting is "work in progress" and should not be regarded as completed. The ideas and opinions of the participants in the forthcoming Biennial Plenary meeting of the DAE will be incorporated in the final version of this document which will be published at the end of 1995.

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## **Preface**

The principle authors of this paper are David R. Evans of the University of Massachusetts and Christopher P. Shaw of the DAE Secretariat. This working paper for the DAE's 1995 Biennial Plenary Meeting in Tours, France, draws upon the work of the authors of the African case studies and makes full use of ideas and understandings which emerged during the authors' workshops. It also draws upon a variety of published work in the field of education policy formulation. Since this is a conference working paper, it was decided not to include academic references and a bibliography. This paper will be edited to reflect the discussions of the participants at the meeting in Tours and, in the revised version to be published after the meeting, a relevant bibliography will be included. Earlier drafts have been reviewed by member organizations of the DAE, by the DAE Secretariat and other external reviewers.

## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the process that a government uses to formulate policy in the education sector. The process of policy formulation can be seen as having three phases: problem analysis and policy formulation; decision making, sensitization and legal adoption; and, implementation, monitoring and adjustment. The paper is structured around these three phases, explaining each in detail and drawing upon six case studies—Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique and Uganda—for illustration of how these different phases work in practice. The major themes raised in this paper are that policy formulation is a non-linear process and that successful policy formulation and implementation is greatly enhanced by two key factors: a broad-based participation of all major stakeholders in education; and, strong and stable leadership.

## Introduction

1. Successful education reform in Africa is dependent on the quality of the underlying education policy. DAE's work has been guided by this awareness since its inception, and it emerged as a powerful lesson from consultations on project implementation at the last Biennial meeting. Beginning in 1990, DAE sponsored a series of case studies on education policy formulation in five countries in Africa. These studies formed the basis for a series of technical review meetings and ultimately a decision to undertake a second set of case studies, this time written solely by authors who were citizens of the country involved. Together these efforts have produced ten cases from sub-Saharan Africa which constitute a substantial knowledge base. The cumulative African experience in Education Policy Formulation reflected in these cases and in their summary analysis, provide the background for the discussions at this Biennial Plenary meeting.

2. The DAE Biennial meeting in Angers in 1993 recognized the importance of having in place "long-term education sector development strategies" which presume a clearly articulated and fully supported education policy framework for the country.

During that meeting and subsequently, Ministers of Education and donors alike have increasingly become concerned with the "how to" questions of education policy formulation. In addressing these questions two facts emerged. First there was the recognition that a number of African countries had a history of education policy formulation from which lessons could be learned. That realization led to the case studies which are available to the DAE Biennial. Secondly, the issue of education policy formulation was of sufficient importance and immediacy to be a suitable theme for the 1995 Biennial meeting in Tours. Lessons and methodological guidelines can be extracted from the case studies which would assist all African countries in creating or improving their national education policy structure.

3. One of the central lessons to emerge from the case studies is the diversity of experience in African countries. Past discussions about policy formulation have focussed almost exclusively on the *content* of policy, such as EFA, efficiency, or access for girls -- while the *processes* of policy formulation, have been little analyzed or discussed. With the increasing worldwide movement towards more active involvement of civil society in governance and policy, and the movement toward decentralization, governments are seeking to learn lessons from each another about policy processes as well as content. Approaches to education policy formulation vary widely between countries depending on their colonial history and hence their inherited patterns of interaction between civil society and the state. Equally clear is the existence of windows of opportunity which depend on

### Box 1 - Data Base on Education Policy Formulation

In the past five years, DAE, with the support and collaboration of USAID, has sponsored case studies on Education Policy Formulation in ten African countries. The cases are:

BENIN*	BOTSWANA
GHANA*	GUINEA*
MALI	MAURITIUS*
MOZAMBIQUE*	SENEGAL
TANZANIA	UGANDA*

Printed copies of these cases are available to all participants in the meeting. All ten are available in English, six are also available in French (marked with an asterisk above.)

both internal political and economic conditions and on external patterns of relationships with the donors and international economic forces. Running through all the cases are two central themes: the need for publicly stated education policies which are understood and supported by both government and civil society, and the importance of participation by the diverse parts of society who will be affected by the policies.

4. The literature on policy formulation tends to characterize the process as a set of steps which follow a logical order. The case studies illustrate that reality is more complex, less clearly ordered, and seldom reflects a simple application of technical rationality in decision making. This paper will present a simple schema in the next section to provide a conceptual framework to help in ordering discussion of what is otherwise a confusing swirl of events and actions in the policy arena. However, it is recognized that neither the cases nor the experience of most countries will fit exactly into any one model. Subsequent sections of this paper will examine a series of issues which emerged from the analysis of African national experiences. The final section will set out a series of key questions which all countries must address when they face the challenge of making or reforming education policy.

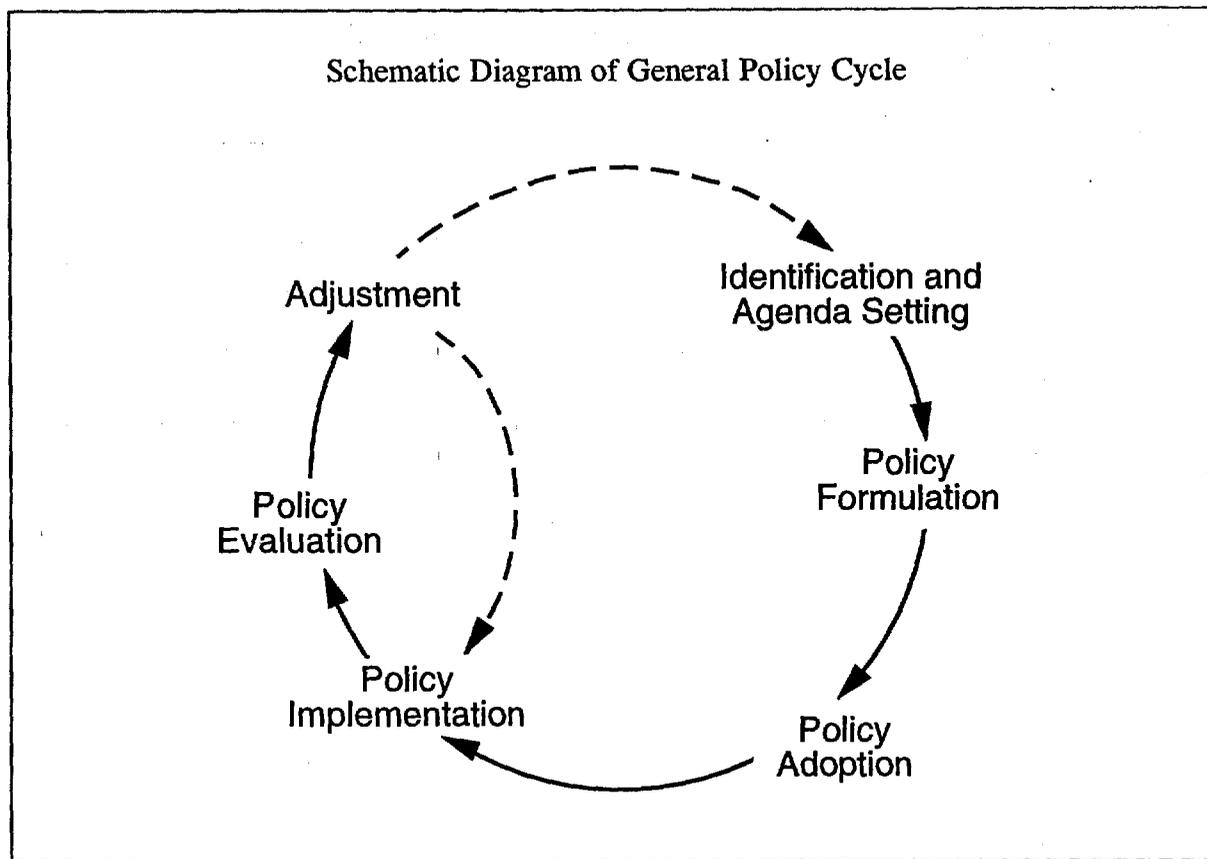
5. This paper is a working draft prepared by the DAE Secretariat to help structure discussions at the meeting. As was done with the Biennial meeting in 1993, the conclusions and recommendations generated during the meeting will be incorporated into the final version of this document before it is printed and distributed.

## **Stages of the policy formulation process in education**

6. Almost all descriptions of policy formulation contain some version of a policy cycle—a set of stages beginning with problem identification and ending with evaluation of implemented programs—which creates a revised understanding of problems and begins the cycle anew. A typical example of a policy cycle would contain the following stages:

- Identification of policy problems; setting the policy agenda
- Formulation and assessment of policy options
- Adoption of particular policy options
- Implementation of policies
- Evaluation of policy impact
- Adjustment and beginning of new policy cycle

Instead of seeing these stages as necessarily sequential, one can view each of the "steps" as a challenge which will have to be faced at some point in the process of policy formulation and implementation. The case studies demonstrate very clearly that policy-making takes place in specific contexts, and that characteristics of the environment strongly influence every stage of the process.



### Six stages in the policy process

7. Identification and agenda setting. Policy problems originate from a variety of sources: some are *technical* or *professional*—planners seeking to rationalize school locations or educators concerned about content of the curriculum; others are more *political*—parents worried about the ability of their children to gain access to higher levels of education or teachers unions frustrated by their terms of service; and some come from *external sources*—donors advocating a policy orientation such as improved access of girls to basic education. Advocates with enough power or access to decision-makers can pressure leaders to address a particular problem. Coalitions of different groups can gradually form around a particular issue, for instance discontent with continued poor performance of pupils on the secondary examination. When pressures are strong enough, the issue becomes a policy problem to which the government must respond and the problem gets placed on the policy agenda. It should be noted that there is a difference between identifying problems, which can come from many different sources, and getting problems onto the policy agenda, which requires visibility for the issue and significant levels of interest from powerful forces in the government, in civil society, or from the donors.

8. Formulation of policy options. Once problems are identified and put on the policy agenda, the rational planning approach indicates that alternative solutions should be drawn up and evaluated. All too often, this step is incomplete and only one solution is investigated and prepared in detail; thus reducing the options and limiting the possibility of arriving at an effective and efficient solution. However, when this stage is undertaken

rigorously, several options with desirable characteristics are set forth and compared: they are technically sound, they are economically feasible, and they are politically practical. If the problem is rationalization of the delivery of primary education, then plans to close or merge primary schools to achieve an efficient distribution of services may be technically and economically sound. Yet, such a plan may be politically risky if many of the affected schools were founded by religious groups and serve largely those groups. An alternative policy which links government support for schools to participation in a consolidation plan may be more acceptable, although perhaps less economical or technically sound. Making judgements about the desirability of the various tradeoffs involved in different options is the responsibility of the political and educational leadership of the country. Who else participates in the process of creating options or deciding on their desirability will depend on the specific country context, the time period, and the characteristics of the policy problem being addressed.

9. Adoption of policy options. This stage requires a process to select which policy options to implement and then a means to create the necessary support within government and society in support of that option. Various approaches are used to formalize these decisions. In Anglophone Africa, where there is a history of education commissions, the government normally takes the most recent policy commission report and responds with a White Paper indicating which recommendations will be accepted either in part or in full. The next step is promulgating administrative circulars which set out administrative implementation, or drafting bills for the legislative structure to enact the enabling statutes. In Francophone countries, recommendations coming from Etats Généraux are selectively implemented by Ministries of Education or sent to parliament for action. In both contexts the process is neither as linear nor as technically rational as this description implies. In all cases, severe resource limitations and the priorities of external donors play an important part in setting *de facto* priorities for implementation.

10. Implementation of policies. Implementation moves from policy options to selecting specific strategies to carrying out policy. Strategies in turn are converted into plans with actions, timelines, and resources. The choice of strategies is subject to local conditions and a variety of constraints, including resource availability and managerial capacity. It is important to stress that implementation should be understood as an ongoing part of the policy formulation process, as policies interact with local realities and are adjusted accordingly. Policy as implemented and experienced is the final definition of what a policy comes to mean in practice. How education programs are actually implemented was the subject of the 1993 meeting in Angers, France.

11. Evaluation of the impact of policy implementation. Evaluation of policies has two components: first, collecting information to measure the effect, if any, which the policy has had on education; and, second, if the impact is not that which was desired, then assessing what caused the results to be different. Assessing the impact of a change also implies the existence of baseline data prior to policy implementation. Measuring the outcomes of policy changes implies the existence of capacity to collect information which will provide an appropriate indicator of the policy impact. In most African countries, there is at least a rudimentary capacity to collect basic statistics about the educational system, some of which may be useful in assessing policy impact. For instance, policies designed to increase

enrollment ratios or access for particular groups like girls can easily be tracked by reliable enrollment statistics. Other policies however may require more sophisticated indicators, such as end-of-form learning outcomes. Many countries do not have such capacity at this point. Evaluation of policies designed to increase learning will be more difficult, and may be forced to rely on small samples or anecdotal information. Typically, data about the delivery of *inputs*, such as trained teachers, textbooks, or learning materials are used as substitutes for direct measures of learning *outcomes*.

12. Adjustment and the beginning of a new policy cycle. This step is essentially identical to the first stage discussed in this section—identification of policy problems. If policies are found to be less effective than expected, then a judgement has to be made whether the lack of effectiveness is of high enough priority to be placed on the policy agenda again. If it is, then assessment of the causes of failure are needed. Lack of effectiveness can come from two general sources:

- inadequate capacity to implement the policy effectively, or
- problems with the policy itself.

Donors have traditionally assumed that lack of implementation capacity is the problem and sought to provide assistance in the form of projects to increase that capacity. While lack of capacity is often a contributing factor, assessment of the policy itself may also be needed. More recently it has become fashionable to assume that what is needed is more and better data and analysis. In reality the problem may be related to low demand for data—a management culture that is not used to using detailed information in the decision-making process. Sometimes the policy is appropriate, but its operationalization in the form of procedures and rules is unworkable. Policies as interpreted and implemented have to produce the desired results, be cost-effective in the local resource context, and above all must be politically feasible. Often policies as interpreted locally have unintended side effects which limit the achievement of the desired results. For instance, policies regarding pupil pregnancies may require the girls to leave school but have no consequences for the boys, with the result of further reducing girls' continued enrollment in school and increasing parents' reluctance to send girls to school.

### **Characteristics of the policy process**

13. Characteristics of policies. Study of experiences in formulating and implementing educational policies demonstrates convincingly that the characteristics of a policy strongly influence both the process used to formulate it and the likelihood of its successful implementation. Policies vary in terms of the location of their impact, the short or long term distribution of benefits and costs, and their technical and administrative complexity. All of these influence the likelihood and location of institutional resistance, the extent to which consultation both in government and in civil society will be required, and the amount of administrative capacity which will be needed. Consider the difference between a policy to reduce school construction costs by changing construction techniques and a policy to introduce continuous assessment. In terms of school construction, building methods can be modified in the central ministry and contractors informed with little impact on existing schools or the rest of the government. In contrast, continuous assessment requires the development of reliable and valid classroom testing items and procedures, extensive in-

service training of teachers and a new class and school level record keeping system for individual pupils. Hence, one policy on school construction may be easily implemented coming up against little resistance, while another policy on continuous assessment would require a complex process to generate understanding and support from all levels of the educational system.

14. Policy formulation as a continuous interactive process. In practice, the elements of the policy cycle do not take place as a series of discrete steps, but are experienced as a continuously interactive process. At all stages, affected stakeholders seek to make changes which address their concerns. In this sense, the formulation of policy options is not something which happens only at the beginning of the cycle, but is continuous, with important inputs being made even after the adoption of a particular policy option. Thus even well into the implementation stage, powerful actors can and will seek to influence the translation of policies into regulations and actions. Policy leaders often underestimate the importance of the large numbers of mid-level bureaucrats and school-level educators who will influence the form which policies take in practice. Failure to involve these cadres in the policy process at an early stage may increase their resistance during implementation. Under some circumstances, these actors can block or reverse policies when they reach local levels. A good example is found in countries where new textbooks which have been delivered to schools are not being used by the teachers, who feel more comfortable teaching as they have always done without texts. The old adage about education is still valid—when the door to the classroom is closed, the teacher controls what takes place.

15. The policy cycle. The policy cycle will vary widely in different contexts. Steps may be skipped, several stages may be concurrent, different actors or bodies may be at different stages at the same time, or the process may follow a different order. There are benefits and costs for any particular approach in a given context. Sometimes the process starts in the middle of the cycle, or there are long intervals between steps. In Ghana, for example, the policy formulation process took place more than a decade prior to large-scale implementation in the mid-1980s. In effect, they started at the implementation stage, skipping previous ones which were felt to have been done earlier. Subsequent evaluations suggest that some of the skipped steps produced undesirable effects which will have to be rectified in a second cycle of policy revision and implementation. The sequence of steps followed is also strongly influenced by the nature of the policy itself, some policies require extensive work at each stage and others can be quietly implemented with little attention to most of the stages.

16. To provide a common basis for a discussion of the confusing swirl of policy events, the six stages of the complete policy cycle can be grouped into three major phases. The paper continues using these three phases. They are:

- Problem analysis and policy formulation (composed of identification, agenda setting and formulation of policy options)
- Decision making, sensitization and legal adoption (composed of decision making and the formal adoption of policies) and,
- Implementation, monitoring and adjustment (composed of operational activities, implementation, evaluation of the impact and adjustment of the policy).

In each phase, there is a range of issues and process decisions which depend on the specifics of the local context. In the following three sections, the paper will discuss the issues which African experience has shown to be most critical for each phase. A number of issues like leadership, participation, and donor involvement run across all of the phases. The case studies provide examples of solutions or approaches which are relevant to each of these phases.

## **Problem analysis and policy formulation**

### **What conditions trigger or support education policy review?**

17. For many countries the first key issue is simple: "When should a national process of education policy review be initiated and how does one get started?" The first step in the process involves assessing the context. The cases point to the fact that national reviews of education are often triggered by crisis or change:

- after a new, often revolutionary, government has come to power—Benin, Mali and Uganda;
- at the end of a period of conflict or war—Mozambique and Uganda;
- or when public dissatisfaction with the condition of education reaches a level where it can no longer be ignored—Ghana and Guinea.

Other factors can also support the decision for a policy review. In Mauritius, the decision was motivated by the growing awareness that the current educational system was not able to produce the kinds of graduates needed by the crucial export economy of the island. In rare cases, like Botswana, the policy process has been institutionalized in a manner which promotes systematic consultation on policy issues at all levels of society.

18. Governments have different motivations for undertaking a national review of education policy. For new revolutionary governments with an ideological mandate to reform society, education is seen as a critical institution for socialization into the new values and beliefs of the regime, a way of overcoming the old ways of thinking. For all governments successfully delivering educational services is central to creating a sense of legitimacy and capacity for the government. If access is limited, dropout rates high and educational quality poor, then people will be dissatisfied with the government. New governments need to establish credibility that they can function effectively—education provides one of the most visible ways of demonstrating their competence. If a government is threatened by political conflict or serious economic problems, initiating a large, visible meeting or review process can be a means for strengthening a government's legitimacy.

19. Countries in severe economic difficulty will likely be under strong pressure from the donors to undertake structural reforms, including a rationalization and strengthening of basic social services like education. As the case studies make clear, donors have often played a significant role in initiating or supporting policy formulation. Donors have funded data collection to support policy analysis, helped organize meetings where policy alternatives are discussed, and provided both local and international technical assistance for various steps in the policy cycle. Not infrequently donors have made the existence of a

## **Box 2 - National Education Policy Review -- Strengthening Government Legitimacy**

Benin was for 17 years governed by a military Marxist regime. From a situation where education was highly valued in Benin society, the regime's unsuccessful "new school" and the failure of its education reform led to the decline and the devaluation of education. Over the same time span, the regime became progressively incapable of paying civil service salaries and student scholarships. The state became literally bankrupt. Teachers were not paid, schools were closed and this failure in the education sector was one of the factors which contributed to the fall of the regime.

The new government that came into power in 1990 was mandated by a National Conference to address the issue of education—seen by all as critical to the renewal of the state. The government set about building its credibility through a focussed and concerted effort to reform the education system. The government held meetings under the framework of the "Etats Generaux de l'Education" and immediately started to prepare the formulation of a comprehensive education policy. The national debate on education allowed the new government to build legitimacy and to create a sense of competence.

The government saw the preparation of a national education policy as an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to address an issue that was one of the visible failures of the previous discredited regime. By addressing the issue of education policy at the national level, the new government hoped to demonstrate its technical competence and, in doing so, convince the electorate of its legitimacy

coherent policy framework a pre-condition for further investment in the education sector, thereby exerting pressure on governments to undertake a full review of education policy. The question needs to be asked whether local conditions are conducive for undertaking a full review. If instability, state resources or lack of managerial capacity indicate that major sectoral reforms would not be implemented, then it may be more appropriate to undertake a sub-sectoral review or a specific feasibility study until national conditions are appropriate. The challenge to governments and to donors is to explore ways in which the donors can provide constructive support to the policy process which is appropriate to local needs and which strengthens local capacity for ongoing policy analysis.

### **What structures or methods can be used for policy review?**

20. When conditions are favorable for initiating a national review of education policy, what procedures have been used by African countries? The case studies show two clear patterns, which not surprisingly, grow out of the colonial heritage of the countries. In all cases, some sort of a temporary working group is formed and charged with carrying out a process of policy review and formulation. The process involves in varying proportions: identifying problems in the education sector, assessing a variety of suggested solutions, and producing a coherent set of policy recommendations which after review by the government can become the basis of reform and development for the nation's educational system. The characteristics of the process are very much conditioned by the national context and the historical precedents for policy making.

21. In the Anglophone cases—Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, and Mauritius as well—the process is quite explicit and is based on an historical pattern which goes back well before independence. Periodically, government appoints a National Education Policy

Review Commission which is a temporary, independent group charged by government with the task of looking at education, soliciting inputs from a range of people interested in the sector, and formulating a coherent set of policy recommendations. The Commission is typically chaired by a distinguished national educator and has representatives of all the major stakeholders in education in the country. Many commissions have working groups for specific sub-sectors like primary education or teacher training, each of which co-opts professionals from the appropriate ministries and from society. The final commission report is presented to government and often made available to the general public as well. Government then responds with a White Paper indicating which recommendations it is accepting in part or in whole. The process is well understood in these countries and it is regarded as a legitimate method—inherited from Britain—for the government and civil society to work together in drafting education policy.

22. Not surprisingly, given the differences in colonial heritage, the Francophone cases—Benin, Guinea, Mali, Senegal—reflect a rather different approach to policy formulation. In these countries, the emphasis is on consulting national and international experts and the consultation of civil society takes place through a formally convened national debate on education policy matters. The cases reflect a varied pattern of irregularly convened *Etats Généraux* or National Seminars on Education, often preceded by preparatory activities. In Benin, UNDP sponsored a series of studies by joint teams of consultants—national and international—which formed the basis for policy discussions. These studies were followed by meetings of stakeholders in government and in education to discuss a sub-sector. These are large national meetings, often comprised of several hundred people who get together for two or three days to debate issues in education. There may or may not be any formal document or pronouncement resulting from such gatherings. The outcomes are viewed by government as only being advisory and there is usually no formal response on the part of the government. The Ministry of Education will choose what to do with the information and advice it has received during the meetings. Occasionally, the gathering is a way to inform participants and to mobilize support for a policy which the government is on the point of implementing. In these cases an *Etats Généraux* is often an activity of the ruling political party rather than an independent source of advice to the government. Sometimes such meetings are seen as a way of relieving tension in the ongoing discussions surrounding education. In almost all cases there is a predominance of teachers and their unions, and the process can tend to become more politicized than in the Anglophone countries.

23. Both of these patterns offer models which, with suitable adaptation to local circumstances, may be helpful to other countries with similar historical contexts. More unique experiences are shown by the Mauritius and Mozambique which reflect their own cultural, political and historical contexts. Mauritius exemplifies a country with a diverse cultural composition which has evolved a politics of consensus in the context of relatively high economic development. Mozambique reflects a country emerging from decades of civil war, relatively resource poor and lacking a tradition of participation by civil society in education policy formulation. In all cases, the importance of the historically generated patterns of consultation and expectations of the role of government cannot be over-emphasized; they set the context within which any policy process must operate.

## **What knowledge base is needed?**

24. Several of the steps in the policy cycle require a systematic knowledge base. A considerable body of literature exists on educational planning and policy which discusses the technical analysis, information requirements and options available for improving educational systems. This literature assumes that policy making is linear and technically rational, occurring in a clear, logical sequence of steps. The process begins with a diagnosis which assesses the state of the education system, followed by a definition of its problems and, most importantly, an analysis which seeks to understand what is causing the problems. Once an analysis of one component of education is started, one rapidly discovers that education really does form a strongly linked system which must be dealt with as a whole. Educational costs are inevitably linked to teacher terms of service, unions, parent and community inputs, and supervisory roles of headteachers. Thus, to support these steps a fairly comprehensive knowledge base is required. Two general approaches to acquiring the needed knowledge are illustrated by the cases: either a sequence of smaller studies on sub-components of education which provide input to a comprehensive policy review; or, carrying out an education sector survey. Both strategies are usually supported by whatever statistical data is available from the planning section of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance.

25. The first approach of conducting sub-sectoral studies is illustrated clearly in the examples of Uganda and Benin. In Uganda a series of 16 pre-investment studies, mostly carried out by two person teams of a national specialist and an international consultant, were commissioned on topics like: teacher supply and demand, science and technical education, textbooks and instructional materials, the financing of primary education, and an enrollment projection model. During the same period the planning unit undertook a national school census using a revised and expanded instrument. In Benin a similar series of studies were carried out under the direction of working committees with external support from UNDP and UNESCO. In both countries the studies served a dual purpose: providing a clear diagnosis and analysis of components of the educational system, and in the process creating increased awareness and educating the participants about the nature and extent of the problems.

26. The second approach, undertaking an Education Sector Assessment or Survey is an even more common process used to review and analyze the education system. (There are several of the DAE Working Groups which address these issues: the working group on Education Statistics; the working group on Sector Analysis, etc.,). Sometimes the entire sector is covered, but often nowadays, such an exercise is more likely to focus on basic education, or secondary education alone. Sector Surveys are normally instigated by donor agencies who need a comprehensive analysis to justify assistance to particular components of education. The survey is typically done by an outside team of experts, sometimes with local members as well, in a relatively short period of several months. The result is usually a comprehensive and technically competent analysis, within the limits of the available data. While many donors make an effort to involve government in the process, both the process and the resulting document are seen by all as being "owned" by the donor. The government, typically feels little obligation to do more than acknowledge receipt of the document. Not only is the document externally owned, but it is predominantly rooted in

the technical rationality of cost-effectiveness and currently accepted international norms for educational practice. The analysis and recommendations usually have not been evaluated in the local political and social context and may not be acceptable or implementable as a result. The document can be a valuable part of the database for a government initiated policy process, and should be used as such. In the absence of any national policy analysis, the sector study may become the *de facto* policy basis for negotiations between donors and the government. However, for true national ownership of a reform process, government must be intimately involved in the sector review.

### **How is a coherent and sustainable policy framework assembled?**

27. Once problems have been defined, the analysis shifts to understanding the causes and looking for ways to solve the problems. Many problems in education are symptoms produced by complex combinations of factors, and can not be fixed with simple, single-factor solutions. For instance, the all too common problems of dropouts and repeaters are often cited as policy targets for improvement with little thought about how to change the behavior of the pupils. Extensive research in many settings has demonstrated that dropouts, particularly of girls, are caused by multiple non-school factors—family economics, perceptions of the utility of schooling, cultural gender norms—most of which are not readily influenced by government policy or action. The problem of repeaters is often addressed by administrative fiat—rules prohibiting repetition or limiting the number of times a pupil can repeat. This approach ignores the real causes of the problem, which may be poor teaching, low nutrition, lack of textbooks, or even the inadequacy of the teachers' assessment skills. So, the task of seeking possible solutions to problems requires access to existing research results on a regional and international level, as well as research and knowledge rooted in local cultural and historical conditions.

28. Policy formulation ultimately requires making choices between policy options. Selecting an option for a specific problem relies on the evaluation of the pros and cons of the options. Two sets of criteria come into play: technical, rational judgements based on research knowledge, educational practice, and honest assessment of financial capability; and judgements based on an understanding of the local context—political, economic and social. Once a series of choices has been made, there still remains the difficult task of assembling the choices into a coherent and feasible overall framework of policies.

29. In those settings where an education commission is appointed, the commission produces a detailed report summarizing both its individual policy choices and an overall policy structure. However, most commission reports have serious shortcomings when viewed as coherent policy statements. Because the process is widely consultative and the combined membership of the commission and its working groups can be quite large, the report usually reflects a series of compromises when choices have to be made. The result is commonly a long list of policy statements—often more than 200, sometimes referred to as a "wish list." The document accurately reflects the desired goals which a nation has for its educational system and is valuable for that reason. However, some subsequent process is needed to make hard choices to set priorities for implementation in the light of serious resource constraints. A first step in that direction comes in the form of a White Paper which sets forth the government's position on the recommendations of the commission.

Even the White Paper though usually deals primarily with the general acceptability of the policies, not specifically with their economic or administrative feasibility.

30. In settings where national seminars are used for policy discussion, a different means is used to produce an overall policy framework for the country. National meetings and preparatory committees produce the components for an overall policy, but the task remains with the government to produce a written statement. In some cases there may be no complete statement, but rather a series of decrees and actions implementing parts of the recommended policies. In the case of Senegal, after the Etats Généraux of 1981 a National Commission was appointed to translate the resolutions produced into implementable educational policies and practices. Yet, their final report was submitted to the president of Republic three years later. Guinea provides an interesting example which illustrates the linkage between the amount of support which has been generated for policies and the level of specificity which is appropriate. This is described in Box 3.

### Box 3 — Building Support for Policies

The example of Guinea's "Programme d'ajustement de secteur de l'éducation" (PASE) is especially interesting as it followed neither of the two patterns from the case studies. Instead, through a series of internal workshops, the education ministry—working with other key ministers—undertook a problem identification and diagnostic exercise. External funding agencies assisted the diagnostic and analytic work by staffing and participating in the on-the-job training of sector staff through these workshops, which led to a shared consensus on the main problems and their respective priorities.

The Ministry of Education then formed a small internal commission to prepare a sector policy declaration that laid out in clear terms the government's goals and priorities. It was deliberately kept short and focussed and did not spell out in detail all the specific operational objectives or strategies (in contrast with Mauritius, where wide consultation in the design phase led to very detailed "Master Plan"). The sector declaration was submitted to the Council of Ministers for official government approval, which was both rapid and unanimous. Thus, the Ministry of Education had—with its own staff—prepared a broad, but short, policy declaration which was endorsed by government, and supported by its own staff and that of the central ministries.

However, the real work in building support for the policies of the PASE now began. Implementation of the policy statement required a further stage in which broad goals were translated into a series of specific action plans and prepared by the regional and national authorities responsible for their implementation. At this stage, the question was no longer "what should be done?" but rather "how should 'x' be done?". The whole sectoral ministry was mobilized and consultations inside the sector and throughout the country were widespread. Each year for the period 1990-1994, action plans were prepared by the education managers throughout the country. To ensure wide support and understanding of the PASE, the national workshops that prepared each annual action plan took place in a different location of the country. The minister and senior ministry staff undertook regular visits to the regions and wide use was made of the media (press and radio). A special newsletter on the PASE and its progress was produced and widely circulated. The annual participative planning exercise laid out clear operational goals for each region, it identified bottlenecks and delays, and contributed to a real sense of purpose and national ownership in the program. The results of the PASE over the last five years speak for themselves, the gross enrolment ratio rose from 28% in the late 1980s to 40% in 1993.

### How much consultation and of what kind is needed in policy formulation?

31. To be effective education policy formulation must be seen as a social and political process as much as a task of technical analysis. Both are necessary, but the latter has tended to take priority, particularly with the donors. Without data and technical analysis,

policy will remain vague and will reflect the entrenched interests of the status quo. Without active social and political participation in the policy formulation process the outcomes can be faulty policies, policies which are not implemented, and sometimes active public opposition to the policies. The goal of the policy formulation process is not just or even primarily the production of policy. The most important goal is to create a social learning process so that key participants in education, including parents and students, come to understand the nature of the problems faced, the resource constraints which exist, and the kinds of tradeoffs which will be needed to achieve the desired educational outcomes. When done properly such a process can produce general awareness of the problems, neutralize potential opposition, and mobilize support for the difficult policy choices which are inevitable in developing contexts.

32. What parts of government and society need to participate in the policy process? There are many stakeholders who are critical to successful education policy making (which includes implementation): officials in the education bureaucracy, both central and local; officials in other ministries, particularly finance and planning, civil service and often local government; legislators and representatives of groups from civil society such as religious bodies for schools, relevant unions and political organizations; and parents, employers and chambers of commerce. Which stakeholders are particularly important depends on the local context. Not all groups have to participate equally at all stages of the policy process. Some will be more important when problem definition is being considered, others will be essential as technical solutions are discussed, and still others have the power to block implementation strategies unless they are consulted at that stage. The answer to the question of "who should participate?" depends on the stage of the policy process, the nature of the specific policy being considered, and the local context.

33. The local context also influences the amount and kind of consultation that is appropriate. A good mental exercise to use in thinking about participation is to ask two key questions:

- ▶ What groups benefit from the current distribution of educational services in society? and,
- ▶ Who would lose and who would gain if specific policy changes were made?

Reflecting on these groups and their power to either support or hinder proposed changes will provide a good beginning in thinking about who should participate in the process of diagnosis, analysis, and formulation of policies for education. What organizations, religious groups, ethnic associations, regional groups exist which have a strong interest in education? How are teachers organized? What means do parents and students have of expressing their concerns about education as it is now, or changes which are being proposed? What do employers want from the education system? Finally, it is always essential to ask what groups have the power to block implementation of particular policies, and how such groups can be transformed into supporters of new policies.

34. Strong leadership is essential in initiating a participatory process. Participation is at root a political process and as such it involves risks as well as benefits. Participation also requires skills and certain kinds of expectations from both citizens and from government

leaders. Deciding how much and what kind of participation to use in an education policy process requires a sophisticated understanding of the national context and the opportunities presented at any historical moment. There is general agreement that democratic societies require participation and that when done effectively better policies and improved likelihood of implementation will result. Making those judgements and deciding when and how much risk to take is the role of leadership in the policy process. Leaders need courage to deal with the inevitable conflict and opposition which arises during the dialogue and also faith in the ability of the process to produce workable compromises rather than destructive conflict.

35. Note that there are different kinds of participation. At the problem definition and solution stage, participation should involve serious, respectful listening to those most involved and effected—such as teachers, for they are often the best informed and can propose effective solutions. Once policies have been determined in general form, then a different form of participation may be appropriate. Policies need to be explained, the conditions which give rise to them must be understood, and different groups must come to see that their role as citizens is to consider the good of the whole nation and not just their own private interests. Forums are needed to explain, to justify and to mobilize support for policies. Negotiations, the capacity for constructive compromise, flexibility in local implementation procedures, and dialogue may be necessary with groups who feel they are losing specific benefits in the short-term.

## **Creating the conditions needed for implementation**

36. The middle phase of the policy cycle combines three steps:

- Refining Policy Decisions
- Creating the Legal Basis for Implementing the Policies
- Building a Supportive Climate for Implementation

These are not separate activities which follow each other sequentially, but rather are often simultaneous and even mixed with steps from the first and third phases. Cutting across these steps are a series of issues which are central to the African policy experience, including the difficulty of setting priorities, scarcity of financial resources, stability of the political environment, and the capacity of the educational bureaucracy. Policy formulation is a continuous process of refinement which continues from the earliest awareness of problems through the last stages of implementation. Outside experts and agencies regularly underestimate the difficulty of making choices in contexts where there is chronic resource scarcity, strong competition for existing resources and where those who have succeeded in gaining access to resources will fight fiercely to maintain that access.

### **How are policy choices refined?**

37. Even after a relatively coherent statement of policies has been produced in the form of a commission report or statements from a national seminar, most countries are a long way

from a clear set of policy decisions which can be used by governments and donors as a basis for making budgetary and investment decisions. Such reports reflect some winnowing of policy options, but they are valuable primarily because their recommendations are statements of collectively shared values and goals: such as universal primary education by the year 2000, vocationalization of the curriculum, or substantially increased access to secondary education. Sometimes issues are deliberately left unclear, indicating that the process was unable to reconcile conflicts over key issues. A good example of the latter is often found in language policy, where recommendations are frequently vague or contain a variety of options left to political leaders to deal with.

38. For Anglophone countries, the next step is a government White Paper, usually produced by a small committee of educational professionals from the Ministry of Education, in consultation perhaps with a few key stakeholders. Historically, most White Papers are short comments on the major recommendations of the commission, approving or rejecting some recommendations and amending others. The result is a somewhat refined list of goals, usually without a timeline or any detailed attempt to test the economic feasibility of those recommendations that have been accepted. The White Paper is still essentially a political document, indicating the government's position on the issues. In countries which use other mechanisms, there may or may not be a public document stating the government's position other than what was produced by a national meeting.

#### Box 4 — An Innovative White Paper Process

Uganda's most recent Education Commission engaged in extensive consultation during the process of reviewing national education policy. They held hearings in different parts of the country, received hundreds of written submissions on different policy issues, and traveled to neighboring countries to learn from their experience. Yet, some of the leaders of the national political party felt that the process had been limited to the same elite group which had been in control of the country since independence. They felt that a broader range of participation was essential to build a new Uganda.

They chose to use the White Paper process, normally a quick technical review, to reopen and widen the debate on education policy issues. In the end the process lasted almost three years as the White Paper went through three drafts before being debated in parliament. Several innovations were used. First, the White Paper was a complete re-write of the Commission's Report which meant that it was long, and that it stood on its own as a complete document. Second, the draft policies were discussed at length in many contexts. Early in the process a one month meeting of all senior officials in the Ministry of Education took place outside the capital city. Then, after copies of the draft had been submitted to the political councils at the district level, a national consultative conference for all district and national education officials was held. This was followed by a consultative conference with representatives of various women's organizations, and finally by an extended debate in parliament.

This unusual White Paper process also reflects the tensions between the established educational leadership (of what had been a good educational system in the 1960s) and the revolutionary political leadership of the new government. The membership of the original Commission was dominated by well-respected senior educators from before the revolution. The revolutionary government used the White Paper process to insure that its ideological goals were met and that the resulting document had the full support of its political organizations.

39. Policy refinement also requires assessment of the financial feasibility of recommended policies. Nearly all African countries face severe resource constraints which make many policy targets unreachable in the medium term—particularly goals like universal primary

education or substantial increases in the salaries of teachers. Determining just how fast a policy goal can be approached is a challenging task, requiring fairly sophisticated data and modeling capacity to estimate the financial implications of various options. While progress has been made in this area, not even the donors have the full capacity needed to answer these questions with certainty. Both donors and government need to recognize that reconciliation of policy goals and financial capability will be a process of successive approximation, but that estimates nevertheless should be made and inserted into the dialogue.

40. Serious confrontation on the need to set priorities and make choices is stimulated most often by pressure from donors who, using priorities and a time frame derived from their own mandates, offer to fund specific parts of the education policy goals. The government is then confronted with the option to accept the assistance and thereby establish *de facto* priorities within their policies, or seek major modifications in dialogue with the donors. What is often unclear, even to donors who should know better, is that the opportunity and recurrent costs associated with donor-financed programs are significant and will likely result in non-implementation of other parts of the government's plan. When the government decides to go ahead with a donor-financed program, then serious policy refinement begins to take place within that sub-component of education. Dialogue between the donor and government during the negotiations, planning and design of implementation can result in increased understanding of local constraints by the donor, and increased capacity of those on the government side. The risk is that, while refining policies in one area the repercussions for other parts of the education sector will be overlooked to the detriment of larger government policy goals.

#### **How is a legal basis for implementing the policies created?**

41. The procedures for converting policy statements into legally approved instruments is very specific to each country. To move from policy proposals to implementation will require one or more of the following: approval by cabinet, issuing government circulars, promulgation of presidential decrees, or passage of enabling legislation by parliament. At each step of the process, further dialogue and refinement will take place. Sometimes policies previously approved are rejected, or options which were rejected earlier in the process are revived, or controversial policies are sent back for more study. Depending on the context, these steps will bring other stakeholders into the debate, or provide new opportunities for both advocates and opponents of policies to use their power to obtain modifications favorable to them. If legislative action is needed public debate may provide opportunities for new constituencies to make their inputs into the process. In each new venue, different criteria are used to judge the tradeoffs between costs and benefits of a policy, and may result in changes in the policy. Policies which were supported primarily on technical-rational grounds will get evaluated on the basis of social or political calculus. The issue of language policy in many countries illustrates various tradeoffs, between the ideological goals of a national movement trying to create a new national consensus and the political constraints imposed by the potential for instability inherent in such a volatile policy issue.

### Box 5 — Dealing with Controversial Issues: National Language Policy

Policy regarding the language of instruction in schools is a matter of some controversy in Mauritius, a small island state which has no indigenous group and is highly multi-ethnic—Indian, African, European and Chinese. Language policy was raised as an issue in the working group for the Master Plan, but it generated strong opposition from those who felt that the issue had been discussed at length for decades with no resolution, and that no resolution was likely in the education plan either. Current policy has most children studying three languages in school, none of them the Creole vernacular, with the consequence that a very large part of the primary curriculum is devoted to language learning. National culture in Mauritius values compromise and consensus. This took precedence over the technical and pedagogical aspects of the debate. The Master Plan, in the end, did not discuss language policy, but rather recommended a study on the teaching of languages in primary schools. Subsequently, a Parliamentary Select Committee proposed that performance in Asian languages on the CPE examination count toward the ranking of pupils used to determine entry into secondary education. This proposal produced strong reactions that broke along communal lines with opposition centered in the African and European communities. Failure of the Master Plan to address the issue was a conscious, pragmatic decision which recognized the potential harm that could result.

The Ugandan Education Commission of 1987 was charged with making a recommendation on language policy in the schools, but the commission felt the issue was highly political and should not have been in their terms of reference. Ultimately, they recommended only that local languages and Swahili be taught in the schools as subjects, and referred the matter for further study. During the long period when the Commission report was being digested by government, a fierce debate took place outside of public view between those in the National Resistance Movement (NRM) who felt strongly about the use of Swahili as one component in the construction of a new Uganda, and professional educators concerned about the proficiency in English needed for the higher levels of education and other effects on learning. The White Paper, when it was finally issued devoted a long section to the importance of Swahili as an essential component of NRM strategy to unify the country and promote development. Their revised recommendations went much further: Swahili and English were to be taught as compulsory subjects to all children throughout both the primary and the secondary cycle of education. In addition they recommended a series of promotional and developmental activities all aimed at hastening the day when Swahili would be both a national language and the medium of instruction. In the end, the White Paper passes the decision to the Constitutional Commission for final resolution, but makes very clear what outcome it supports. Ultimately the cabinet, recognizing that the language issue was politically volatile and potentially damaging, referred it to committee for further study.

42. Moving the policy process forward through legal channels requires strong leadership within the government. The Minister of Education, or in some exceptional cases a strong well-placed civil servant such as the Permanent Secretary or group of senior civil servants needs to take the initiative in pushing the process along, getting the policy statement on the agenda and moving it toward formal approval. Delays in this process are often caused by conflict surrounding unresolved issues, or opposition to a particular part of the policy statement by some key official who either was not consulted earlier, or who is representing some constituency with vested interests that may be negatively affected. Getting the policy approval process completed may require mobilization of outside support to put pressure on the government for action. The larger the amount of understanding and support that was generated during the formulation process, the better the chances are of getting favorable action.

## **What are strategies for building a supportive climate for implementation**

43. A critical task in this middle phase of the policy process is the expansion of consultation on policy details and dissemination of general knowledge about the policies. At every stage of the policy process, the task is a dual one—assessing and choosing from among policy options on a technical basis, and promoting a social learning process which builds understanding of the issues and support for solutions. Setting the stage for implementation of education policies is an unusual challenge because of the number and diversity of people who must agree and cooperate in order for implementation to be effective. The seeds of that collaboration are best planted early in the process, in many different constituencies, and nursed continually throughout the process. The many strategies discussed in the case studies form a repertoire of options from which each country can choose.

44. The methods used to build support for implementation will depend on what structures are available in a specific context. In a society with a revolutionary government which has built a network of local and regional level structures, such as the National Resistance Councils in Uganda, the ten-house cell system earlier in Tanzania, or the system of local councils in Botswana, policies can be disseminated and discussed at all levels and the results filtered back up to national level leaders. In countries which have developed a decentralized administrative structure for education, discussion can be organized using the education bureaucracy. Many countries use national meetings, convened around either general reviews of education policy, or around more specific issues such as the terms of service of teachers, or curriculum reform. When such consultation takes place early in the process, it provides an opportunity to listen to peoples' perceptions of the problems and to get their reactions to possible policy options. Later in the process, emphasis will shift toward building a consensus on the nature of problems and on the way in which specific policy options can contribute to the solution of the problems.

45. Education policy documents in many African countries are long, complex statements written in academic English or French. Their form and length make them expensive to reproduce, difficult to read—particularly in societies which traditionally communicate better in oral rather than written form, and beyond the comprehension of most citizens. As a result, these documents are available and used primarily by only the most senior government officials, and by donor agencies and their staffs. One country tried to promote dialogue around the issues by printing and distributing copies of the White Paper to the party structure in all 40 districts of the country. But the document was nearly 300 pages long and written in academic English. In reality only a fraction of those who might have read it could understand it, and fewer still would actually take the time to do so. If real dialogue and understanding is desired, then a simplified and clear statement of the main policy recommendations in local languages needs to be made available.

46. The public media—radio and newsprint particularly—are often under-utilized in the process of building understanding and support for changes in education policies. While education is a constant topic in the media in most countries—focussing on speeches of education officials, school strikes, or complaints about specific problems—rarely have governments consciously made use of the media to promote a dialogue around educational

issues. How many countries have had serious problems with university students, who are incensed because they have been asked to share some of the cost of higher education? In how many of these countries was there a concerted effort to explain to both students and parents the need for such changes and the benefits to the nation of shifting the savings to other parts of the education system? The greater the number of people who need to cooperate in making a policy change work, the more extensive the consultation, dissemination of information, and building of support needs to be. Sometimes governments are afraid to provide information to the public in fear of the possible response, but attempting to implement changes by fiat can produce even more disruptive reactions.

### Box 6 — Using Media for Policy Consultation

In the early 1980s Botswana embarked on an expansion of the basic education cycle to nine years by creating separate junior secondary schools. By 1988, significant opposition and widespread misunderstanding of the value of the system had arisen. In response to this public concern, the Ministry of Education initiated an innovative approach to policy dialogue called "consultative conferences." They decided to use video tape as a way to bring the voices of parents, pupils and communities to the national leaders, and to let the local people listen directly to discussions among the leadership. The purpose of the process was to develop a *common perspective* on the problem which the nation was facing.

Using four policy issues—the problem of school leavers, the curriculum, the role of the community, and the need for education changes—a short video tape was made about each issue. Interviews with key stakeholders like chiefs, teachers, members of the kgotla (a local council), pupils and parents were videotaped. A tightly edited ten-minute tape was produced containing representative sample opinions. Interviews in Setswana had English sub-titles and vice-versa. Each video introduced the issue with powerful visual images. The school leaver video used images of a long line of school leavers standing in front of the employment bureau in Gaborone as a backdrop for the opening titles. Then students in the line, officials, and community leaders were interviewed on how they felt.

The videos were used in a series of four consultative conferences. The first conference was for the national leadership and was opened by the Minister who reminded participants of Botswana's long-standing tradition of grassroots policy dialogue rooted in the traditional kgotla. The conference format consisted of small groups who watched a video, listened to a panel of respondents and then held open discussion. The videos provided a forceful grounding in reality, compelling the discussion to confront the local realities and limiting escape into general platitudes. The outcome of the conference was a fifth video tape of selected discussions and the responses of national leaders. The five tapes were then used in a similar manner in a series of three regional conferences in the country.

47. Where state-society relationships are open enough, a country will benefit by having a variety of non-governmental organizations which are capable of undertaking policy analysis and carrying on public discussion of issues. Whether these are research organizations loosely linked to the university, more narrowly based interest groups, or organizations of concerned citizens, having multiple voices able to raise and debate issues along with the government promotes public policy dialogue as part of the social learning process. In Mozambique policy formulation on higher education was initiated by a council of university officials who began meeting and drafted a proposal for consideration by government. In other countries there has been a growth of NGOs, some of which have the capacity to articulate problems of the less-fortunate and to raise educational issues in the media. While having the multiple voices of stakeholders speaking can sometimes be embarrassing for a government, in the long run it creates a climate in which better

education policies can be formulated and implemented. How much dialogue is possible depends on the social and political context in which it is occurring.

## **Policy implementation, monitoring and adjustment**

48. Perhaps the single most challenging step in the policy formulation process in African experience has been to take a list of policy statements and convert them first into a series of strategies and then into a detailed implementation plan. While implementation may not at first glance seem to be part of policy formulation, in reality it may be the most critical part of the process, determining what form policy takes in reality and how policy is experienced in the schools. Some authors argue that implementation should be seen as a series of policy experiments, others would argue that it is part of a continuous, interactive process of policy refinement. Either way it can be seen as policy in practice.

49. Issues in the implementation of education projects was the theme of the 1993 DAE task force meeting, so this paper will treat the topic only briefly. This third phase of the cycle can be broken down into a series of components:

- Operationalize policy into a detailed plan with timeline and resources
- Assign responsibility for implementation to specific people & units
- Supervise, coordinate, and support the implementation units
- Monitor progress of implementation
- Identify problems and corrective measures as needed
- Review periodically the adequacy of both policies and implementation

As in the other phases, several important issues cut across these stages, including leadership style, setting priorities, the need for local capacity, and continuing to build support through participation.

### **How are policies translated into plans and priority decisions made?**

50. Implementation requires attention to the political realities, especially to stakeholders who have the capacity to block changes. It also demands greater attention to the technical and administrative rationales and depends on the capacity to produce detailed, costed plans. Most policy documents, even unusual ones which contain prioritized tasks and some attempt at costing, are still very unrealistic in the context of likely resource availability. Creating effective plans requires:

- Personnel with the experience and skills to convert prose statements into plans,
- Timely access to a national knowledge base which allows them to estimate the size of the task, and
- Cost data to create realistic budgets.

In most countries in Africa all of these are problematic and some may be missing. Historically these are components which donors have sought to strengthen through a variety of

projectized interventions, but the capacity rarely persists for long. Policy makers will have to recognize this chronic lack of capacity and find realistic ways of dealing with it. Donors can seek out ways to continue to promote the development of local planning and implementation capacity.

### **What kind of leadership mechanisms are most effective?**

51. Implementation of policies also requires strong leadership to provide an unwavering vision of the goal and reliable support as administrative units confront un-anticipated problems and resistance from those who oppose aspects of the plan. Implementation of any significant reform in education, as reflected in a set of new policies, requires not just a single leader, but a group of leaders, preferably organized into some sort of management council or committee. Both Guinea and Ghana have instituted oversight committees to monitor progress in the reform. Institutionalizing such a committee, at least for the period of the reform process, helps to insulate the reform from changes in personnel or over-dependence on the personality and power of any single individual leader. If the process of policy formulation which has gone before this stage was effective in using consultation, it should have built a community of support for the changes from both government and society which can be drawn upon during implementation. Implementation may also mean

#### **Box 7 — Using Forceful Leadership for Educational Innovation**

In 1986 Ghana's military regime decided to undertake a significant reform of the educational system, which had deteriorated so badly that some educators had pronounced it "clinically dead." The government, in keeping with its military, revolutionary style, chose to implement the reform by directive, announcing both the content and timing of the reforms with little prior consultation. The leadership believed that achieving significant reform of education was essential to the social transformation of society and that the regime's political legitimacy depended on succeeding where preceding governments had failed. The content of the reforms were rooted in recommendations of a Commission report presented 13 years earlier.

A small cadre of professional educators who were firmly committed to the reforms was assembled in the Ministry of Education to carry out the implementation. The agency which had dealt with all personnel and professional matters in education in Ghana was abolished, thus removing the protective cover of education officials. Officials at all levels were expected to act as military officers, carrying out orders without discussion. Those who objected or raised concerns were disciplined—sometimes by dismissal, creating an atmosphere of resentment and fear in which problems were likely to go unreported. The government organized a national forum, convened a seminar with district representatives, and used the media for an information campaign about the rationale and structure of the reforms. There was little tolerance for dissenting views; the goal was rapid and effective implementation of the reform as announced.

This approach produced a fairly radical structural reform in a short time period, reducing the number of years in school and implementing a new curriculum. The first cohort from the new system graduated from secondary school at the end of 1993, but did very poorly on the examination. Reforms at the tertiary level were also implemented, some of which were very unpopular with the elites who benefitted from the existing system. On the positive side, the use of strong, centralized leadership pushed through a needed set of reforms despite the inevitable opposition of those who lost privileges. On the negative side, the reforms produced very low quality results in the first groups and created an atmosphere of tension and disillusionment among many of the educators who were needed to run the system.

Ghana, in a currently more open political environment, is now re-examining the reforms, holding extensive consultations with a variety of stakeholders, and is embarking on a new cycle of policy review and formulation in education.

reconciling unrealistic "political promises" made by political leaders with technical and resource constraints. Universal primary education may have been promised for the near future, but somehow the state must communicate with society in a realistic and responsible way that the goal can only be partially realized.

52. Continuity in leadership is one point often overlooked by African countries and donors alike. One of the major constraints to effective management of education in sub-Saharan Africa is rapid rotation of the political leadership of the ministry of education. Indeed, one minister has remarked that the post of education ministers has a lot in common with an electrical fuse: when the system gets too hot, the fuse is replaced! The case for strong and stable leadership of a sector is clear. Education is a system that takes anywhere between six and sixteen years to produce its graduates; rapid change of the sector leadership, indeed rotation in a timespan as short as two years or less can only handicap education development. Two of the case studies demonstrate that continuity through strong and stable leadership is an essential component for implementing the full set of education reforms implemented throughout the system. It is no surprise that many of those countries that have successfully implemented far reaching reforms of their education systems (Mauritius and Guinea to name but two) have benefitted from stable and strong sector leadership.

53. Implementing some reforms, such as cost sharing at the university level, present formidable challenges. Inevitably such changes involve scaling back privileges enjoyed by a predominantly elite group. This group is vocal, politically active, and usually resident close to the seat of government—in short they can and will object to changes in their benefits. The government faces two tasks: first, opening discussion on previously un-discussable assumptions about higher education, and two, creating a powerful enough coalition of forces to overcome the inevitable resistance. Consultation and dialogue is useful, particularly in stimulating debate about previously unquestioned autonomy and financing, but in the end there will be some form of conflict. Policy leaders will have to weigh strategic options ranging from fairly authoritarian announcement of change and rapid implementation to extensive consultation and gradual implementation. Both strategies have risks: the former of revolt and violent opposition, the latter of having the process captured by the elites and little change ever taking place. Examples of both are easily found in the recent history of higher education policy in Africa.

54. Monitoring progress of implementation means defining useful indicators of performance and finding cost-effective ways of collecting it. Collaboration with the annual education statistical exercise carried out by the Ministry of Education will produce some of the needed information. Other data may have to be specially collected, probably by using small samples of schools, to provide feedback on progress. The committee charged with overseeing the implementation can use the data to review both implementation strategies and the content of the policies themselves. Constant adjustment and refinement will be taking place during the implementation. Instituting some sort of formal evaluation periodically is also desirable—to the extent that the implementation relies on external funding, the donor agency will probably require evaluations and will fund them.

## **Interaction between country context and the policy process**

55. Policy making, at all stages in the process, is always set in a context and is strongly influenced by the characteristics of that context. In any country, civil society and governments are strongly conditioned by past experiences, by commonly shared norms about the roles of government and the rights of citizens, by expectations about how education should function, and by cultural norms about such things as leadership, fairness, and proper behavior. Countries have histories and countries are always in transition. A country with a history of open participation and dialogue may be enduring a period of conflict and tight government control; or a country with a long history of strong central government with little accountability to the electorate may be experiencing an opening up as forces of discontent reach the stage where they cannot be ignored. A military dictatorship is unlikely to tolerate an open grassroots debate about education policy, nor will a country accustomed to open dialogue be receptive to having education policy dictated by the Ministry of Education.

56. Countries can be described as having histories of being more or less open to public dialogue on education, with many of them currently in transition from one-party systems of governance to multi-party democracies. Some of the variables which may indicate receptivity to dialogue in a country would include:

- the degree of centralization of decision-making and control over resources in education.
- the extent that political leaders are accountable; the existence of accountability mechanisms, elections or other checks such as a parliamentary question process.
- the existence of a free press and non-government radio in the country
- the ideology of the ruling party; is it explicit about encouraging participation in governance?
- the presence of a country-wide participatory structure; is it within a political party or across parties?
- a history of public dialogue about the education policy process; are there accepted procedures which are familiar because of their past use?
- government receptivity to input from civil society, and openness of public officials to other perspectives.
- the existence of capable non-governmental agencies with a history of undertaking policy analysis and publicizing their findings?

Whatever the current degree of receptivity to dialogue, the policy making process will have to take place within that context. However, strong leadership in education can result in innovations which have no historical precedents in that context. Several of the Francophone cases describe fairly radical changes as the result of new governments.

57. Sustainable policy formulation is ultimately a task of arriving at a shared consensus, motivating large numbers of people to change their expectations and behaviors, and using the power of government to support those changes. None of these goals are fully

achievable without consultation. Effective consultative procedures make use of skills, attitudes and expectations about the desirability of dialogue on matters of educational policy. Politicians and professionals in the government are learning to value the input from the civil state and to listen to the opinions of citizens. Citizens are beginning to understand that it is both a right and an obligation to become informed and to participate. The process of learning how to undertake productive consultation is slow and gradual, especially where there is little prior experience with it. The greater the change being attempted, the more extensive the benefits of consultation. Each country controls how far and how fast it can proceed in extending the participation of the civil state in the process of education policy formulation.

## **Concluding issues and key questions**

58. Drawing on both African experience and the literature in policy formulation, this paper has set out a number of central issues and raised some key questions which face any country embarking on a general review of education policy. The core understandings include:

- Policy making involves a series of challenges which have to be faced and overcome. While it is helpful to know what these challenges are, the experience of each country in dealing with them will be different.
- Policy making is an interactive, continual process which occurs at all points from problem definition to detailed implementation—policies are always undergoing change and refinement.
- African countries have considerable experience in carrying out periodic national policy reviews which create a new policy framework for education.
- There are many specific approaches to education policy which have been successfully used in a various African countries.
- There can be no recipe which prescribes specific methods for a given country to use in education policy formulation, but there are general guidelines and much experience to draw upon.
- The leadership of each country must choose the best options depending on the specific context in their country at the moment.

Further clarification and new understandings will emerge from the discussions at the 1995 Biennial Plenary meeting in Tours. The knowledge base will be broadened from the ten case studies by including the experience of all the participants at the meeting.

59. Although the contexts will vary widely, each country seeking to undertake a comprehensive review of their education policy framework will face a common set of challenges which are captured in the following list of questions.

1. How does one assess when it is appropriate to undertake a national review of education policy?

2. How does one initiate a policy review exercise? What structures and procedures would work given the national context?
3. What knowledge base is needed at the beginning, as the exercise proceeds? How can it be strengthened in the short-term to support a policy review?
4. How can the various components of the process be best adapted to the local context?
5. What leadership structures will be most effective throughout the policy formulation and implementation process?
6. How can one build organizational structures that can transform policy statements into clearly defined strategies and then into detailed plans?
7. What process or structures can best ensure that realistic decisions on goals and priorities get made?
8. How does the government formulate its plans so that donor assistance supports government goals and does not counteract government priorities?
9. How can one consciously plan to involve stakeholders and the public in the process of policy formulation? How does one sensitize large numbers of people about policies, promote understanding of needed sacrifices and tradeoffs, and generate support for change?

The Biennial Plenary meeting will provide a variety of resources to assist the participants as they join together to generate multiple answers to each of these questions. Taken together these answers will form a repertoire of options from which each country team can select according to their goals and their local contexts. The answers generated during the discussions will form the basis for the revision of the conference document before it is produced in a final form.

