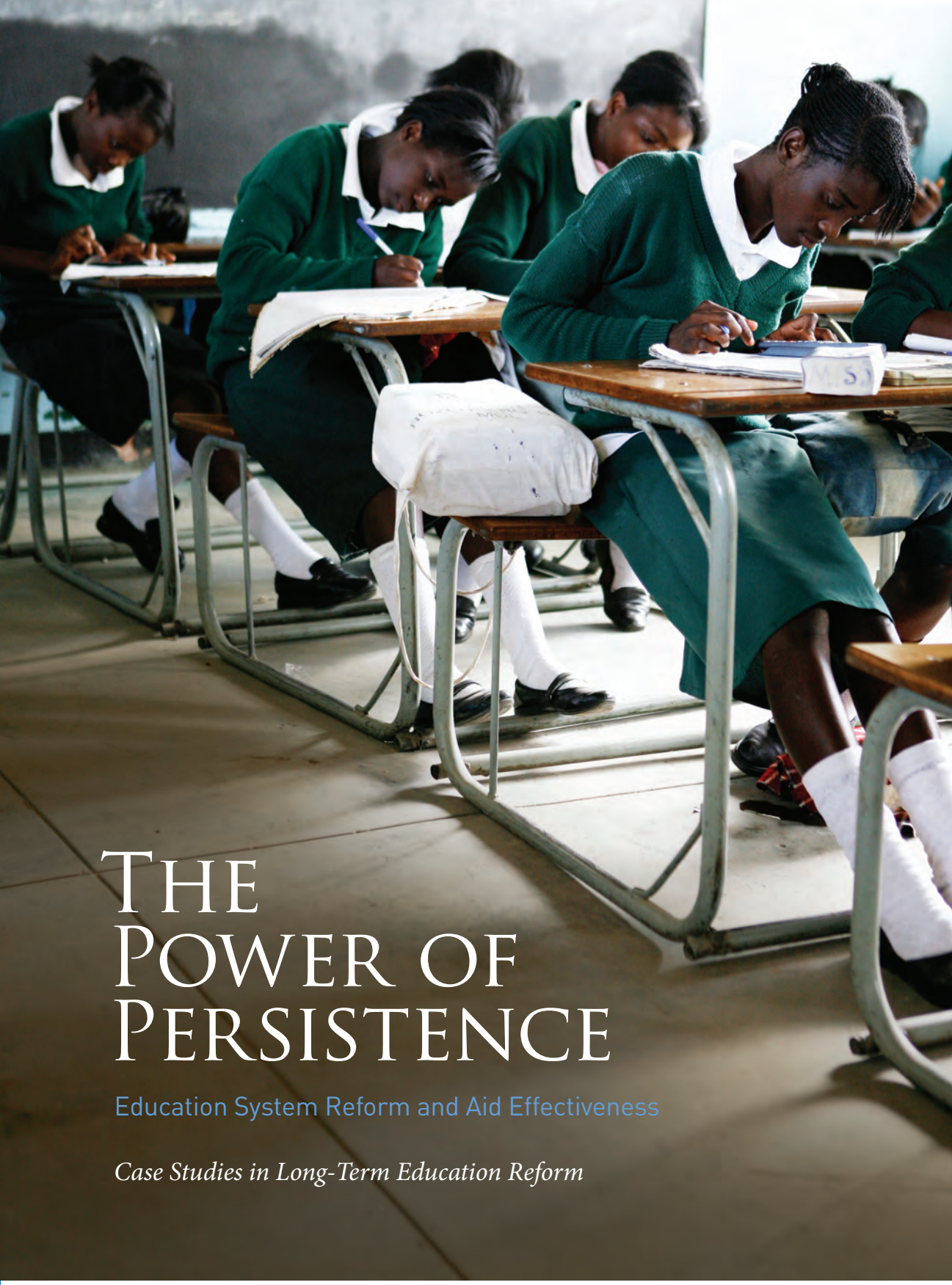

The Power of Persistence

Education System Reform and Aid Effectiveness

Case Studies in Long-Term Education Reform

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EQUIP2
Educational Quality Improvement Program
Policy ▪ Systems ▪ Management

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November 2010

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments **v**

Foreword **viii**

Executive Summary **1**

Section 1: Introduction **11**
- Challenges in Education System Reform 14
- Evaluating Aid Effectiveness in Education Reform: Exploring Concepts 17
- A Systems Approach to Education Reform: What constitutes meaningful change in education systems? 27

Section 2: Lessons from Country Case Studies **43**
- Summary of Country Case Studies 45
- Egypt 49
- El Salvador 67
- Namibia 85
- Nicaragua 99
- Zambia 111

Section 3: Summary Findings and Conclusions **131**
- Findings 133
- Conclusions 148
- Implications for USAID Policy and Programming. 156

Bibliography **158**

Acknowledgments

This study is the result of a two-year inquiry into the dynamics of improving the performance of education systems on a sustainable basis, and the role that donor assistance can play in achieving such improvement. The study was focused on the forces that influence how complex policy and institutional changes are introduced, adopted, and sustained in a society over a 20 year period, rather than on the impact of specific policy prescriptions or programs. This challenging subject required reflection from many experienced professionals and the willingness to think broadly and deeply about the process as well as substance of education reform. We were fortunate in having an abundance of such thoughtful contributors on our team, in each country, and in USAID and other donor organizations.

The study builds on the foundational work of the USAID Education Reform Support series developed by Luis Crouch, Joe DeStefano, and Hank Healey in the 1990's, which was updated under EQUIP2 in 2005 by Luis Crouch and Joe DeStefano. The overall conceptual approach and case study design was informed by the EQUIP2 technical leadership and implemented by an extraordinary team of colleagues who led the country case studies, worked through ways to apply the conceptual framework, and worked together to draw out lessons across countries. My particular thanks and recognition goes to the case study leaders: Mark Ginsburg (Egypt), Jessica Jester Quijada (El Salvador), Donna Kay LeCzel (Namibia), Kirsten Galisson (Nicaragua), and David Balwanz (Zambia). Their contributions went well beyond completing the case studies themselves to enhancing and improving the methods, instruments, and understanding of the process as the study moved forward.

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Foreword

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Educational Quality Improvement Program 2 (EQUIP2) is a Leader with Associates Award that conducts research and disseminates information on education development with a focus on policy, management, and system reform strategies to create more effective education programs. The project has addressed such complex topics as abolition of school fees, decentralization, cost-effectiveness of complementary education systems for hard-to-reach populations, school effectiveness with an emphasis on efficient use of instructional time, indicators and information systems, secondary school teacher shortages, and donor effectiveness. EQUIP2 research combines two perspectives: 1) The implications for national education policy supporting EFA goals and 2) the implications for more effective support from donor agencies.

The Power of Persistence grew out of an on-going series of discussions and the above-mentioned EQUIP2 research about the nature of education reform and the role of donor assistance. The intent of this study was not to replicate the standard evaluations of donor projects, but rather to understand the technical, institutional, and political dynamics of introducing complex changes in education systems over the long term.

Most education studies focus on either the relative effectiveness of technical or policy strategies (e.g., decentralization, school fees, or teacher training) or on evaluating whether specific projects or programs have achieved their goals. Some seek to identify common findings of multiple projects, like EQUIP2's *Analysis of USAID Assistance to Basic Education in the Developing World*, 1990–2005, a meta-evaluation of USAID projects over a 15 year period. These studies contain important lessons about policy and project design, but often fail to provide useful insights into sustainability, institutionalization, and scaling up. However, these studies often fail to capture the contextual dynamics of culture, history, and political and institutional forces that shape reform adaptation and sustainability. Evaluating results through the narrow window of activities in a five-year project inevitably gives a distorted view of reality and leaves one with an impression that most projects are successful, but that education systems neither improve nor sustain reforms.

The Power of Persistence seeks to address these weaknesses by applying the lens of long-term systems change. This research brings three unique perspectives to the study of education development: 1) A review of education reforms in select countries over a 20-year period; 2) an emphasis on the perspectives of the key national players and their understanding of education reforms; and 3) a focus on the dynamics of change by applying systems concepts to the analysis. This perspective reinforces our understanding that education reforms are a development process, not a technical fix.

This study has three major sections. The first section explores the central concepts of aid effectiveness in education, including effectiveness, ownership, sustainability, and scaling up. The paper introduces the reader to basic concepts about systems thinking, and describes the analytical model of education systems development that is used in the study. The systems model highlights the interaction between the political, technical, and institutional dimensions of education reform.

The second section reviews the introduction of education reforms in five countries over a 20-year period. The five countries—Egypt, El Salvador, Namibia, Nicaragua, and Zambia—are not intended to be broadly representative of all developing countries, but do capture a range of national contexts, including post-conflict recovery, democratic transitions and elections, scale of national bureaucracy, and role of civil society.

The third section draws on common patterns across the five countries, explores the process of reform, and discusses implications for national planning and donor engagement in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

The Power of Persistence highlights the importance of recognizing the evolving dynamics of national politics and institutions in achieving sustainable, long-term improvements in education systems. USAID hopes that this study will be useful for donors, implementing partners, and governments in designing and carrying-out successful strategies for improving educational outcomes.

Patrick Collins

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Executive Summary

EQUIP2 Education System Reform research funded by USAID focuses on the dynamics of education system reform from two perspectives: the political and institutional factors that influence technical reform, and the role of donors in support of sustainable improvements. After more than fifty years of development assistance, with both the rationale and structure of international assistance mechanisms under intensive critical review, meaningful and actionable insight into effective donor support for national education systems has never been more urgently needed.

The Power of Persistence: Education Reform and Aid Effectiveness reports the findings of a two-year study of reform efforts supported by international donors in five specific national systems in the period between 1990 and 2009. Most of the existing literature on education reform is has been concerned with specific interventions and policy reforms necessary to improve education. This report considers that research and turns focus on the process challenges of introducing, implementing, and sustaining reforms, in order to better understand the nature of education system change, the indicators and measures of forward progress, the key points of leverage and support to facilitate change, and the productive roles that donor agencies play.

The single most important lesson from these case studies of the **political, institutional, and technical dimensions** of reform efforts over two decades is that for effective and durable reform, all specific interventions, policy reforms and project activities — decentralization, service delivery, dialogue, information and analysis, teacher training, workshops, textbooks and testing — must be understood and strategized in the context of longer-term goals and trends.

The case studies do not represent evaluations of specific projects, programs, or reform strategies, and the report does not seek to stipulate what policies should be adopted, but to articulate what orientations and realities enable the identified goals of sustainable policy and system change, and how external assistance can support such change.

The report is presented in three sections. Section One provides a literature review of the key concepts of aid effectiveness, education systems reform, and systems thinking, and presents an analytic framework for education system reform. The analytic framework against which the case studies are analyzed addresses the interaction between the political, institutional, and technical dimensions of national education systems in developing countries. Section Two presents the findings of case studies of education reform over almost twenty years in five countries: Egypt, El Salvador, Namibia, Nicaragua, and Zambia. The methodology included extensive document review and interviews with current and former stakeholders in the ministry, civil society, and donor community of each country studied. Section Three presents a synthesis of the findings, conclusions, and implications for education reform programs. Donors and policymakers and practitioners will find useful information for design, implementation and evaluation of reform aid.

Aid Effectiveness and Education Systems Reform

The goals of all national education systems are based in the concomitant needs of society and individual students. The primary focus of the international education agenda for the past twenty years has been to achieve universal access in primary education, and gender equality through efforts like UNESCO-supported Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. Gathering international consensus on the importance and the practicability of these goals informs donor efforts to support relatively straightforward national initiatives to give all children equitable access to schools; to ensure learning outcomes that demonstrate required skills and knowledge; to keep them enrolled in school until completion of a prescribed regimen of instruction; and to ensure that learning is relevant to the needs and demands of society for productive citizens.

Although much of the international focus for the past decade has been on increasing primary school enrollment and completion, recent academic research emphasizes that the quality of learning within an education system is a more important factor for economic growth than is the quantity or number of years completed within a system. The quality challenge is substantially more difficult to solve than that of access, which can be addressed at relatively low cost and largely on the basis of increased resources at the national level, or cash transfers at more

local points of contact. In fact, because of weak education systems in developing countries, financial transfers that make theoretical sense may, in some cases, create distortions that actually undermine efforts to address the central system issues of capacity, policy and accountability gaps, curriculum, management, and effective teaching that are the key constraints to improved learning outcomes.

The international donor community's dialogue on *aid effectiveness* is focused on ensuring that international assistance contributes to measurably resolving these problems. However, much of the debate is centered on the effectiveness of alternative aid modalities and coordination across donors rather than on the challenge of effective development of sustainable national systems that address these problems. The aid effectiveness debate includes diverse perspectives ranging from the application of the Paris Declaration principles, calls for more resources (Sachs), and new paradigms for assistance that avoid the pitfalls of the imposed "big plan" (Easterly) that relies on top down reform.

At the heart of calls for new approaches and modalities are four core issues: **ownership, impact, sustainability, and scaling up**. The extended exploration of these concepts in this report arrives at the conclusion that success in these closely interrelated issues depends more on long-term development of robust national institutions than on particular aid modalities or on technical fixes that are provided on a short-term project basis. As in any complex social institution, change that improves education systems requires 'reculturing' (Fullan) of organizations and individuals in a dynamic environment — and in planning for the systems' ongoing dynamic response.

Understanding how any actor, internal or external, can support sustainable changes in education requires first understanding the functioning of the existing system's underlying structure, which determines how that system can react to change. Systems, both natural and human, are resilient and self-organizing, and therefore are normally resistant to dramatic change. Sustainable change requires actions that introduce and leverage desirable change, and reinforce 'feedback loops' that sustain change throughout the system over time and increased scale. In human systems such reinforcing loops of feedback can be achieved through information, political support, incentives, or other means. The EQUIP2 approach incorporates basic elements of systems theory within a framework that acknowledges the relationships among the technical, institutional, and political dimensions of education, and points of leverage within the system.

Lessons from Country Case Studies

In the period from 1990 to 2009, the five countries under review were undergoing significant political and social change. Two of the countries were emerging from civil war (El Salvador and Nicaragua), one had just become an independent country (Namibia), one faced significant challenges from Islamic militants to a secular system (Egypt), and one was confronted by financial crisis while striving to implement universal primary education (Zambia). These contextual and historical facts deeply affected the direction and pace of reforms in all sectors, and especially in education.

The governments of all five countries placed a high priority on education as an engine of national well-being, and all of them used similar strategies to achieve their goals — notably, increased community participation, decentralization, and school-based management. These common, general strategies resulted in differing experiences, progress, and outcomes, because of particular differences in political, fiscal, social, and even religious dynamics within individual countries. Despite generally common strategies, outcomes varied in each country because of dynamics and contingencies specific to each; the effect of these contingencies on similar efforts provides useful information for development planners.

Egypt effectively addressed many of its access and equity obstacles, but progress on governance and management reforms stalled through the 1990's, in part due to political unrest and government officials' concern about social and military challenge by radical Islamists. Since 2001, momentum for reform has increased, as evidenced by a comprehensive national strategy, a number of important policy changes, and active involvement in decentralization and community participation in seven governorates. Pilot programs demonstrated that it is possible to build the individual and institutional capacity needed to implement decentralization and community participation. However, as of 2009 the implementation of these reforms is still in the early stages.

El Salvador recovered from the devastation of the civil war to establish democratic government and processes that include a remarkably stable national consensus on education, strong country leadership, and coherent, comprehensive long-term strategies and plans. Since 1992 El Salvador has built a policy and system infrastructure and institutional capacity, has implemented internationally recognized models for community-based management, and has slowly improved student learning outcomes. The country's consensus model of development will be tested by the opposition political party — based on the country's former revolutionary front — gaining power in 2009 for the first time.

Namibia has successfully developed a functioning education system out of the racially discriminatory system inherited at independence from its apartheid history. Namibian education reform has benefited from consistent national leadership, while being strongly influenced by the experience of school, district, and regional initiatives, capacity, and leadership. Many innovations are being institutionalized on a national scale, such as participatory school improvement planning, school self-assessment, adaptive circuit support services, on-site teacher professional development, and achievement testing linked to professional development. These reforms were initiated in the historically disadvantaged Northern regions where the majority of the population lives, and have resulted in the best improvements in learning outcomes in the country.

Nicaragua's civil conflict of the 1980s continues to influence the policies and practice of education reform. Nicaragua's progress is sporadic, and subject to dramatic changes in direction in response to political changes within the country. After fifteen years of nationwide implementation of the internationally known, though controversial, Autonomous School model, this approach was eliminated following the election of an opposition political party based on the former revolutionary front that governed the country from 1979 to 1990. The demonstrably effective Active School reforms in rural multi-grade schools have been continuously supported by successive governments, and the models has not only survived the political transition, but has been adopted as national policy and was being taken to scale, growing from a small project intervention in 40 schools to serving over 48 percent of the primary school students in more than 3,000 schools.

By 1990 the **Zambian** education system was in a state of near-collapse after fifteen years of economic stagnation and political crisis characterize the collapse so we understand the reform — no schools, kids not attending, some kids without access, what. Enactment of the National Education Policy in 1996 ushered in fundamental shifts in MOE policy. Changes in the legal framework allowed District Education Boards (DEBs) to be established, and permitted was it the formation of the boards that made it possible for the communities to operate schools? communities to operate schools. Intensive donor engagement is it clear to the reader what intensive donor engagement looks like IN ZAMBIA? supported Zambia's transition to a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) that fostered the development of increasingly systemic management, planning, and monitoring activities. is this the right order for this list? Over the subsequent fifteen years, a reformed education system has supported the enrollment of an additional 1 million primary school children; initiated a new regular standards testing regime;

effected greater inclusion of decentralized actors into education planning and service delivery; and fostered a culture of planning and coordination between the MOE and the donor community.

Conclusions and Implications for Donors

This review of the experiences of five countries in reforming education provides a useful and important sample of the efficacy of international assistance to education in a larger universe of developing countries. These five countries represent three continents, and a range of cultures and conditions. The experiences of these countries are consistent with findings in the broader literature on educational reform and international assistance, and offer insights that may be instructive in developing realistic expectations and promoting sustainable improvements in educational systems.

Among the necessary components for effective education reform for donors are these four:

Ownership is a central tenet of development: countries and the various stakeholders within them must own reforms for the effects of intervention to be positive and sustainable. The cases presented in *Education System Reform and Aid Effectiveness* demonstrate that ownership at the top is not sufficient for changing behavior throughout the system. The commitment and leadership *of each stakeholder group* and actor in the system—national ministry officials, regional education officers, school administrators, teachers, and parents—is essential. Deep ownership at all levels of the system reflect the same lessons about emphasizing the process of engagement, and the establishment of structures to reinforce and validate that engagement over time.

Project Modality. The experience reported in the case studies demonstrates the crucial importance of policy dialogue directed at ownership. USAID's greatest strength and comparative advantage in project modality is its support of policy dialogue that enables societal consultation that fosters the political will and civil society infrastructure needed for fundamental reforms. Upon this basis, projects can make effective contributions through a variety of strategies, including implementing pilot projects, introducing new ideas and knowledge, strengthening the availability and quality of information, and reinforcing processes and procedures that enable further ownership for responsive and sustainable change.

Sustainability in the context of system reform is more complex and subtle than simple continuation of project activities or initiatives. Sustaining change and activities requires an alignment between institutional leadership and ownership by the people involved, supported by policies and procedures that reinforce behavior and provide incentives for commitment over time and across political loyalties. Sustainability requires system reforms to survive changes in leadership at all levels. Sustainability must be balanced with two other elements—change and continuous improvement. In the context of the long term case studies, it appears that the most important focus in pursuit of sustainability is not on specific project activities, but rather on developing and continuing mature and effective systems of management, decision making, and governance. While financial sustainability is also necessary, this study finds that addressing the funding gap alone will not lead to sustainable change.

Scaling Up. requires that other components of reform be successfully addressed—that the changes have been introduced in sufficient depth as to have genuine ownership and leadership at all levels; that the interventions and policies have proven to be effective; and that the reforms are sustainable over time and conditions. When all of these conditions are in place, scaling up is possible, but remains one of the greatest challenges, requiring both patience and persistence.

Several countries in this study have made significant progress in adopting processes and principles on a national scale. The key factors for success have been continuity, adaptation, and time. In none of the cases, however, are specific reforms operating at acceptable quality standards on a national scale. In the rush to scale up in a 'cost-effective' way, there is a tendency to look for a formula, instead of recognizing that the human process of developing ownership, strengthening new behaviors, and changing systems is done at province-by-province, district-by-district, and school-by-school levels. The substantive reforms that affect teacher and student behavior require not simply new knowledge, but rather reculturing, as has been pointed out by Michael Fullan, and reinforced by these case studies.

Implications for USAID Policy and Programming.

The implications the findings from these case studies have for USAID policy and programming are presented in this report as general guidelines. The specific context in each country will define opportunities as well as constraints. An inarguable program recommendation the importance of building in sufficient flexibility to allow timely and nimble customization of programs to take greatest advantage of the opportunities — and to minimize the constraints — in each country.

The factors that most influence sustainable system reform and improvement are related to process and structures and their supporting activities and inputs, such as information, evaluation, technical assistance, and analysis. These interventions necessarily deal with the human aspects of development: ownership, commitment, engagement, and the kind of deep learning that stakeholder reflection can achieve. But this EQUIP2 report offers the caution that interventions are not discrete events, or options from a menu of activities.

Our findings make clear that USAID support of education reform is valuable especially for its singular ability to respond via its programs, project design, and implementation to dynamic systemic needs. To obtain most effective results in international education

- Engage at the policy and system level in ways that are responsive to particular conditions that allow or constrain establishment of and support of *processes* and *structures* needed for long-term development and sustainable improvement.
- Develop and foster a shared philosophy of development in USAID officers that helps define in operational terms the organization's role in enabling development, and the implications for relationships with ministries, civil society, and other stakeholders.
- Define partnership and strategies for what 'accompanying reform' means in each specific country.
- Articulate a nuanced sense of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that exist with the capacity to respond flexibly.
- Explore meaningful ways of measuring and reporting on systems and process support that focus attention and incentives on the process aspects of development.

- Manage policy engagement and reform support activities in ways that balance accountability for program accomplishment and delivery schedules with the scheduling of process activities that require policy engagement and agreement of multiple partners.
- Emphasize the continuing importance of high quality technical work, concrete work products and deliverables, or any of the traditional areas of support such as training, pilot activities, materials development, curriculum reform, etc.
- Balance bi-lateral agreements to government partners with the need for long-term reform.
- Develop and continuously improve guidelines for structuring and conducting evaluations in ways that address particular issues in specific locales, and promote evaluations that acknowledge systems approaches rather than static 'snapshots' of project status.

The findings and recommendations of this report are a contribution to the on-going dialogue on strategies for improving donor programs to support sustainable improvements in education. The empirical evidence of five countries' experience in long-term education reform highlights the need to incorporate social, political, and institutional realities in structuring donor support over the long term.

1 Introduction

After more than 50 years of development assistance to developing countries, the rationale and structure of international assistance mechanisms is under intensive critical review. The role of donors in coordinating intervention within recipient countries and between one another, and ownership of interventions and accountability for managing support by recipient countries are under scrutiny as international and bilateral issues.

The need for meaningful insight into effective donor support for national education systems has never been greater.

> The U.S. bilateral program has undergone significant changes in structure over the past decade, and is currently under intensive strategic review. The technical and management capacity in USAID, the U.S.'s primary implementing agency, has been under-resourced for years.
>
> The World Bank has been criticized by some recipients as ineffective and heavy-handed; the Fast-Track Initiative is undergoing an extensive international evaluation, and major European donors have increasingly moved away from project assistance to work through pooled funding, Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), and direct budget support (DBS).
>
> Recent studies of donor support to education (World Bank 2006, Chapman and Quijada, EQUIP2 2008) raise questions about overall program impact and sustainability, particularly in relation to learning outcomes and education quality.
>
> The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness promotes country-led development, and focuses on the role of recipient nations in managing aid.
>
> In 2008, the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Ghana raised pointed critiques of aid programs, in particular the inefficiencies and lack of coordination among donors.

To a surprising extent, changes in aid modalities and other issues have not been well informed by empirical data about what works and does not work — and why — in particular contexts. A common finding of both the World Bank and EQUIP2 education studies is that too few programs have rigorous evaluations, particularly in terms of the impact on student learning. The Evaluation Gap Working Group has highlighted the lack of solid evaluation as a significant shortcoming in foreign assistance programs.

Most of the existing literature on education reform is concerned with the specific interventions and policy reforms needed to improve education quality or access, such as teacher training, decentralization, textbooks, or testing. This report does not seek to replicate studies on the efficacy of specific reforms themselves, but focuses on the *process* and *challenges* of introducing, implementing, and sustaining these reforms. The report responds to the development sector's urgency to understand the nature of education system change, the indicators and measures of forward progress, the key points of leverage and support to facilitate change, and the productive role that donor agencies can play in the process.

This report, ***Education System Reform and Aid Effectiveness: The Power of Persistence***, is presented here in three sections. Section one is an overview of the literature and concepts of education system reform and presentation of a model of change. The second section presents lessons from case studies of 20 years of education reform in five countries. Section three is a synthesis of findings, conclusions, and implications for development programming.

CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORM

The global dialogue on education development is dominated by international trends in donor philosophy and protocols. The international context has been framed by the global commitment to big development goals, such as UNESCO-supported Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the consensus demonstrated by the Education for All (EFA) initiative. This fact of consensus itself is groundbreaking, as is the emphasis on country development plans and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PSRP) through international mechanisms like the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and progress reporting through the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report. These goal-driven accords are paralleled by the evolving philosophy of country-led development, embodied in the Paris Declaration and Monterrey Consensus, and implemented at a country level with modalities like pooled funding, the Sector Wide Approach (SWAp), and Direct Budget Support (DBS). Under the George W. Bush administration, the U.S. bilateral program was directed through special initiatives including the Africa Education Initiative (AEI), the Centers for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT), and President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), as well as mechanisms such as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) and Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

Through efforts like EFA, the primary focus of the international education agenda for almost 20 years has been to get kids into school (access and universal primary education), and, though to a lesser extent, to keep kids in school (completion

to the point of functional literacy and numeracy). This emphasis on expanding access to primary education has resulted in significant increases in enrollment and reduction of out-of-school children in many countries. Although a significant number of countries are not likely to fully achieve the goal of universal enrollment by 2015, the progress is nonetheless notable.

However, although many more children are enrolled in school, there is accumulating evidence that many of these enrolled children do not acquire the desired level of literacy and numeracy—far less the fluency needed for economic development. In response to this troubling evidence, increased and overdue attention is being addressed to whether and how widespread development activities, incentives and modalities result in reforms sought by recipients and supported by donors.

Recent research by Eric Hanushek and Ludger Wößmann persuasively argues that it is the students' acquisition of skills and knowledge, not the number of years which they complete in schools, that is the more important factor for contributing to economic growth (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2008). A major education sector study at the World Bank concluded that improved learning outcomes should be the central objective of the education portfolio, supported by improved sector management with the capacity for assessment, evaluation, and research to inform decisions (World Bank, 2006). Similar recommendations have come from USAID studies and the EFA monitoring report.

With an intensified focus on improving learning outcomes, education reform's access challenge is largely seen as a mix of expanding supply (financing, school construction and location, provision of teachers and materials) and stimulating demand, primarily by reducing the direct and indirect cost of attendance. While these are not insignificant challenges, they are to some degree responsive to financial solutions, and much of the international response has focused on the funding gap. Addressing quality improvement and learning outcomes requires more than getting children into school; improved learning outcomes for individuals and groups requires a nuanced and nimble address of needs within an even more complex set of challenges that include teacher and principal performance, pedagogy, curriculum, materials, education philosophy, language policy, parental expectations, and culturally appropriate models of education, among others. Introducing changes of this nature on a system scale requires complex reforms that must take into account local political, institutional, and technical contexts.

Among the central strategies that have been implemented during the past two decades have been decentralization to improve accountability and efficiency, expanded community and parent involvement, curriculum reform and provision of learning materials, teacher training, increased funding for education, language policy, school based management, achievement testing, and establishing standards, among others. Virtually all donor programs have supported each of these initiatives at some point, but the present focus on improving quality places the burden on donors to concentrate on the most effective mechanisms, modalities, and strategies.

Multiple studies indicate that the most necessary improvements require system changes rather than only resource transfers. Glewwe and Kremer (2005) found that while access and enrollment can be increased at relatively low cost and largely on the basis of increased resources, there is little evidence that merely adding education inputs has an impact on learning outcomes.

Furthermore, because systems in developing countries are weak, financial transfers may create distortions in funding allocation and fail to address the more significant issues of incentives, accountability, appropriate curriculum, and effective teachers (Glewwe and Kremer, 2005). This is consistent with the findings of Hanushek and Wößmann, who identified key system issues of capacity and policy gaps, efficiency and management as major constraints to improving learning outcomes.

A challenge for donors is to identify ways of helping partner countries to create sustainable effective improvements in access, completion, and learning outcomes on a national level. Over the long term, sustainable improvements require more than subsidies, technical solutions, and filling financial gaps. As important as the resource limitations are in many countries, the heavy lifting required for sustainable improvements in education quality is not financial so much as institutional and political. More mature and effective systems of introducing and implementing changes in a complex system must be developed, and donors and recipients must move beyond the rhetoric of 'owned' reforms, and 'country-led' development to effective means of accompanying partner countries in strengthening their systems.

This report first considers how changes take hold in education systems, what factors impede or support changes, and what role donor activities can play. The next two sections of the report deal with two crucial aspects of reform: First, understanding what we mean by 'aid effectiveness' in the context of education, and; second, the value of a systems approach to education reform as a means of identifying appropriate and effective roles for donors.

An obvious question for donors is—how can support be more effective? What are the means and measures of effective aid? Therefore, a starting point for this discussion is to explore some of the elements in the aid effectiveness dialogue and their implications for accompanying reforms in education systems.

EVALUATING AID EFFECTIVENESS IN EDUCATION REFORM: EXPLORING CONCEPTS

At the broadest level, the national debate within the United States about foreign assistance is over what role, if any, foreign aid should play in US foreign policy and national security considerations. The current consensus within the development community is that the formulation of a Three-D strategy—defense, diplomacy, and development—is essential, and that the development arm of the triangle has been relatively neglected. A more particular set of questions for the development sector deals with whether aid is effective, what form it should take, and how it should be allocated. The researchers and authors of this report examine a sector subset of the question of effectiveness—whether international assistance is effective in improving education systems abroad, and if so, what strategies or approaches are most effective.

Effectiveness is an elusive concept, and needs to be unpacked. Within the term 'effectiveness' are several concepts that are sometimes used interchangeably or as proxies for effectiveness—sustainability, capacity building/institutional development, ownership, and scaling up. In this section the authors seek to define these terms, which will be useful in understanding the case studies.

Effectiveness

After more than 50 years of experience in various forms of bilateral and multilateral international assistance, one would think that the answer to the relatively straightforward question, "Is aid effective?" could be quickly and easily forthcoming. But it is surprisingly difficult to answer with certainty. The literature on aid effectiveness has gone through multiple cycles of theory, revision, evaluation, seminal research, refutation, and renewal. The current development bookshelf has many notable, and contradictory, studies by serious development economists.

William Easterly, in *White Man's Burden*, argues that, overall, foreign aid has had little positive impact, and actually creates as many problems as it solves. He attributes this to a "big plan" mentality that overlooks or undervalues seeking local solutions (Easterly, 2006). Jeffrey Sachs, in *An End to Poverty,* argues that aid has been and can be successful, and that much greater investment is needed

(Sachs, 2001). An earlier influential article, "*Aid, Policies, and Growth*", found that aid is effective when a country has the right policy framework (Burnside and Dollar, 2000). The Center for Global Development has published numerous policy papers on the issue, largely arguing that aid can be effective by addressing structural weaknesses in the aid architecture. The World Bank's annual review of aid effectiveness, sector assessments, and reports from other international bodies question the effectiveness and advocate reforms. The 2008 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana highlighted concerns of the recipient countries, focusing on the need for greater coordination among donors as well as accountability from donors.

The definition of effectiveness depends a lot on who is doing the defining. Donor organizations often define effectiveness in terms of achieving their own mission-driven goals and rationale for providing assistance. At this high level, the emphasis is on long-term goals such as reducing poverty or enabling economic growth. The question can also be framed in terms of program specific goals, such as improving education, strengthening civil society, reducing unemployment, or eliminating malaria. These two levels are often elided, failing to distinguish between means and ends.

As the debate moves from the broad level of relating aid flows to economic growth over time, to sector and program specific goals—to education rather than all the challenges of global poverty—the issues actually become more, not less, complicated. How effectiveness is defined and used is subject to both individual preferences and topical issues. Effectiveness may be measured narrowly in terms of a program achieving its desired outputs, or it may be defined much more broadly in terms of outcomes or long-term impact. Moreover, the definition of what constitutes acceptable effectiveness can change in the course of a discussion, often brought on by the killer program review question "so what?" "So what" is an all-purpose, double-edged rhetorical weapon that can minimize virtually any accomplishment without actually contributing insight into a solution.

From this simple query, an interactive redefinition of effectiveness and success can take on any or all of the following issues:

- Was the project cost-effective?
- Did the government have ownership of the activities?
- Was the project sustainable?
- Was the project scaled up and replicated to have an impact on national indicators?
- Are the relevant national educational measures improving? Are students staying in school and learning? Is literacy improving? Are test scores improving?

- Was the investment in education worthwhile? Did an improved education system and outcomes result in economic growth or improved democracy?

The individually defensible rationales of each of these criteria too often combine to create a situational stepladder in which "success" or "failure" are measured differently from the changeable perspective of each questioner's position. Moreover, in the absence of reasonable parameters for realistic timeframes, distinguishing between what would be effective in a three-year time period cannot be usefully understood in comparison to what would be considered effective over a 10-year period. Effectiveness and success become even more elusive when the terms effectiveness, cost-effective, sustainability, scaling up, ownership and so forth are themselves inconsistently defined, if defined at all, in most program documents.

Ownership

For decades, the need for recipient country ownership of reforms has been widely accepted in development literature. A common formulation through the 1980s and 1990s was assuring 'country buy-in' to donor programs, which implicitly recognized that the donor was the driving force behind many initiatives. Since 2005, the standard has been the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, an international statement of principles facilitated by the Development Coordination Directorate of the OECD (OECD-DAC) that promotes harmonization, ownership, results, alignment, and mutual accountability. This emphasis on "country led development" influences many of the new assistance mechanisms and is part of the standard rhetoric from both multilateral and bilateral development agencies. At the sector level, it is a tricky concept to put into practice, and to foster.

There are inevitable tensions between the donor agency's need for accountability to taxpayers or member states, and the concept of country-led development. Donor agencies have a legitimate stake in assuring that the aid is effective. While considerable attention in development discourse has been given to the idea of country ownership, the dominant standard of accountability has continued to emphasize the donor's expectation of short-term, measurable outputs. Such measurement is complicated by the fact that donor agencies have strong incentives to find success, and to that end to establish high or even unrealistic goals (Chapman and Quijada 2008).

Much of the international push toward non-project assistance modalities (SWAp, direct budget support, FTI, MCC) is justified by the desire to promote national ownership. National governments are required to develop plans, in concert with

civil society, that reflect national priorities, which form the basis for a coordinated international assistance program. There is a lively discussion as to whether such programs generate genuine ownership and put the country "in the driver's seat", or whether, as some witty national leaders have said, they are only chauffeurs for the donor vehicle. As noted in a recent review of the implementation of the Paris Declaration, the experience in the education sector has been challenging given the weak capacity in many countries (OECD, 2008).

Key questions that must be addressed in this discussion is clarification of whose ownership, of what, how ownership is enabled, and what the relationship is between ownership and operational capacity. On one hand, government ownership and national leadership are necessary to facilitate the political, institutional, and financial support needed for most reforms. This condition is necessary, but not a sufficient condition to enable change at the school level. On the operational level, development professionals have long known that ownership at the school level—of principals, teachers, and parents—is the factor that makes the greatest difference in education. Education happens in the classroom, and a national education strategy developed in the capital by political and social elites does not engender much ownership at the school level. However much governments may 'own' the process, the capacity to implement, to perform functions, solve problems, set and achieve objectives at the school level is the key to progress (Fukuda-Parr, 2002).

A related issue is how ownership is related to the development of substantive capacity at the local level. The significant behavioral and organizational changes required by most education reforms are seldom achieved at the school level without substantive ownership, understanding, and commitment. Harvey Smith argues that the key to successful reform is not national level ownership created by financial mechanisms like SWAp that allow for involvement in big decisions, but rather the development of local capacity from the school level up to implement programs. In this formulation, "enabling and facilitating the acquisition of this capacity is the real challenge…" (Smith, 2005).

Ownership and capacity development are not alternative strategies, but related and mutually dependent strategies. Ownership creates the deep-seated commitment that encourages local actors to adopt new practices, strengthens sustainability, and provides the incentive and opportunity for on-going capacity development. A more useful way of framing the challenge is that education development is really about the ability "to support and foster problem solving capacities in the south." (Lavergne and Saxby, 2001).

A final perspective on ownership, as well as capacity building, is whether ownership is an individual or an institutional factor. In real life terms, ownership is almost always related to individuals' embrace of the value of activity. At the school level, the principal and teachers accept, internalize, and promote new educational approaches. At the district level, individual supervisors rethink their role in terms of pedagogical support rather than administrative control, and recast their daily work and skills accordingly. At the national level, Ministers and senior managers develop personal ownership of key concepts and policies of reform, and actively promote them, and a culture of using information for evidence-based decisions is reinforced. In this sense, reculturing is a deeply personal process as well as an institutional one that is reinforced and deepened over time.

Experienced practitioners will immediately recognize the fragility of the process described above. Even in countries where political leadership changes only every few decades, the top education leadership may change frequently. In democracies, such change typically happens on regularly scheduled intervals. More locally and, perhaps, more importantly, principals and teachers may rotate through schools every few years. Specialized technocrats in information management, policy analysis, or IT may be hired away by the private sector or donor community. With each change, the ownership process resets, and new policy directions are possible. The process of developing deep ownership is always a balance between catering to the individuals holding positions of authority today, and promoting an institutional ownership that goes beyond individual preferences. At any given point in time, ownership by one Minister may become a liability to the next administration.

Sustainability

One of the most visible, politically important, and yet misunderstood concepts in development is sustainability. For the donors, sustainability is often the standard against which success is measured—either implicitly or explicitly. In spite of its considerable importance as the rhetorical standard of effectiveness, sustainability is seldom explicitly defined and measured by donors (Chapman and Quijada, 2008).

The claim that development projects are unsustainable is often used as a powerful argument against international assistance programs. The search for sustainability has contributed to numerous aid 'reforms' that are really premature interruptions in programs in an effort to transfer financial responsibility to the recipient country. This causes them to be less effective than they might have been, contributing to a circular argument that reforms are not effective or sustainable. Sustainability is often measured against one of two criteria: continuity of

project activities, and financial responsibility. The project continuity standard is a common and straightforward definition, assuming that all activities and personnel initially financed under donor projects will be absorbed into national budgets and continued after the project ends. For many years, the standard formula for sustainability was a sliding scale of funding responsibility for activities and personnel. The donor would cover start-up and development costs and the national government or local partners were expected, over time, to take over an increasing percentage of direct recurrent costs. Some donor policies explicitly prohibited the financing of recurrent costs. A variation of this schematic is the donor project piloting an activity, and the host country being responsible for replicating it in the rest of the country.

This approach to sustainability has the appealing advantage that it is easy to understand and to convey to political and civil society stakeholders. In practical terms, it is usually unworkable for several reasons. The commitment to absorb new positions and activities may not be feasible given national budget and bureaucratic realities. Unlike government entities, donor financed activities are not subject to the normal constraints and bureaucratic requirements. Financial constraints and tradeoffs for donor projects are simply very different from those of governments. While projects can hire temporary staff as needed, a government has to consider the impact of expanding permanent employee positions—a tack that may be at odds with the fiscal restraint policies proposed by the IMF and World Bank. Equally important, the commitment to finance and sustain activities was seldom directly linked to empirical evidence that the innovation was effective, cost-effective, or feasible.

The ability of developing countries to assume financial responsibility for development initiatives is directly dependent on a growing economy and increasing government revenues to enable an expanding set of social services. In donor countries, the expansion of quality, free, universal public education was enabled through a natural, incremental process in which schools moved from private activities and community contributions (i.e. fee based or subscription schools) to public services through increasing demand, political initiatives, and budget growth. In no case did the donor countries follow an artificial process in which external resources initiated and propped up new services (schools, clinics, NGOs) that were subsequently absorbed into state or national budgets. Nor was the expansion of social services in donor countries accomplished within the timeframe of a five-year project.

The definition of sustainability as a scheduled exchange of funding responsibility from donor to recipient country is increasingly questioned by both donors

and recipients. The World Bank has directly challenged the idea that host governments can or should be responsible for assuming the recurrent costs imposed by donor projects. In a 2002 report, the Bank argued that programming for outcomes (e.g. EFA) in countries where external funding represents a significant portion of the total budget requires sustained external support for program sustainability. There is a logical and practical inconsistency with donors providing large-scale resources to achieve defined outcomes in the short term, but restricting the use of current and future funds from financing the recurrent costs that are incurred as a direct result of the external investment. Such assumptions seldom are based on a rigorous analysis of the financial or bureaucratic reality, and do not acknowledge the core reality that under-financed systems that cannot make up a deficit simply because it would be nice to do so (World Bank 2002). For example, FTI estimated the financing gap for countries to simply reach EFA goals (and not necessarily achieve a desired level of learning) at $836 billion in 2009 and over $1 trillion in 2010. This level of increased education budgets cannot be absorbed in the short term.

The scale of financial commitment required for EFA to provide high quality education creates a genuine dilemma for the development community. On the one hand, both donors and countries must be realistic about the sizeable financial implications of programming for results. On the other hand, the financial cost of inputs ought not to replace the goals of development with an unending international subsidy and welfare system. This binary view of the issue has the potential for both creating dependence, and reducing the incentive for countries to confront hard policy issues.

It may be useful to seek a definition for sustainability that balances between the extremes of unrealistic expectation of return on investment and unending subsidies to better capture the sense of development and usefully inform the debate on foreign assistance. Rather than an engineering process of replicating "best practices" and assuming costs, development is about evolution, growth, and continuous improvement. The most significant contribution of development programs may be in initiating and stimulating change, rather than starting project activities that cannot be continued without on-going subsidies. Michael Fullan, an internationally recognized expert in education reform at Canada's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) has addressed the challenges of sustainable reform in numerous books. Dr. Fullan takes a systems view of education development, pointing out that "system transformation of the type educators now aspire to simply cannot be accomplished without first ensuring solid leadership at all levels of the system" (Fullan, 2002). Fullan's view calls for structuring projects to encourage and support leadership development—

at all levels—may be a fundamental factor in enabling continuity and sustainable impact. Perhaps the outcome of a successful intervention is the development of a more mature and functioning education system, rather than sustained activities, even if it means that national leadership makes an informed decision not to continue donor-initiated programs.

Perhaps the most significant threat to sustained improvement in education programs is the lack of stability in terms of both policy and leadership. When key personnel from the Minister of Education through Directors General and down to supervisors and principals are regularly changed, the fundamentals of development like ownership, leadership, capacity development and commitment are seriously undermined. In these situations, donor programs and bilateral agreements may provide a degree of stability

An important factor for sustainable reform in democracies is the extent to which reforms are identified as national programs rather than those of a politically partisan government. In a functioning democracy with periodic elections, national leadership will change on a prescribed schedule. Education initiatives that are closely identified with a particular government may be vulnerable to modification or wholesale change as the succeeding administration seeks to implement its own programs and claim ownership of achievements. Indeed, one of the core challenges for long-term reform is the natural pressure for administration to start anew—and to have a predominant concern about demonstrable impact over the relatively short term of an election cycle. An inherent tension exists between the long-term nature of effective education reform and the short-term focus of political parties.

Of course, the historical experiences in educational development cast doubt on any implicit assumption that development project activities always should be sustained. Activities should not be sustained simply because they are initiated—they should be sustained if they have demonstrated measurable, cost-effective, and meaningful improvements over alternative approaches. Nor, as noted above, should they be sustained ad infinitum. The process of development is inherently a process in which interventions and activities change and improve rather than remain static at an achieved state. The concept of 'development' itself argues against a narrow or static vision of sustainability.

Scaling up

Scaling up is a simple and appealing concept that can be quite difficult to understand, and even more difficult to achieve. Different interest groups use

the term differently. Donors sometimes understand scaling up to refer to the challenge of increasing the level and volume of assistance needed for substantial impact. The more common usage is at the country level, where there are at least four ways in which the concept is used:

- Scaling up the structure of a program to increase the size or geographic reach.
- Scaling up a grassroots organization to expand the number or type of activities.
- Scaling up the engagement of an organization to expand beyond service delivery to strategy addressing the structural causes of under development.
- Scaling up the resource base of a community program to increase the organizational strength and improve the effectiveness of their activities.

In a national education system, the idea of scaling up refers to a program intervention that is applied consistently in all schools in the system. This gets to the essence of the challenge of systemic education reform, which needs to capture significant improvements at two levels:

- Effective changes in ***each*** school and classroom that improve education quality and learning outcomes, and
- Effective changes at the system level (district, state, national) that support and encourage such changes in ***all*** of the schools.

The challenge of working 'at scale' is captured in the dynamic between these two levels. A traditional project approach is to work in a select region or set of schools, perhaps piloting new approaches, in order to achieve a defined outcome. This has clear advantages for donors—it allows for defined results, it is within the manageable interest of a donor, and it includes the kind of direct support to teachers and children that has considerable political appeal to some stakeholders. Because such projects address the problems in a select number of schools, and do not address all of the system problems, the strength of the approach is also its weakness. A defined geographic or target school focus inevitably means that the impact will be limited to a small percentage of schools in the system. In a populous country, even a relatively large school-based program can at best affect 5 to 10 percent of the schools, which does not enable the changes needed for economic development.

The concept of scaling up responds to the shortcoming of the traditional project approach. If a project dramatically improves conditions in a few schools, then replicating this success in all schools has a more profound effect on economic development. This conceptual appeal of this simple formulation has been a driving force in development for years, but it has proven maddeningly difficult to do. This may be because the planning for scaling up too often has reflected an

engineering mindset rather than the dynamism inherent in human development. In any case, there are few good examples of successful scaling up of education reforms in either developing or developed countries.

Scaling up is challenging for two general reasons. First, development projects create artificial conditions in target schools or regions. These conditions—of financing, technical assistance, training, materials (and of plain attention from experts and national leaders)—are different from those faced by other schools. The arrival of external assistance creates a 'project bubble' within which the conditions, the 'rules of the game' that apply to all other schools, are suspended. The second, and closely-related reason is that successful scaling up requires more than just duplicating the external assistance resources and processes in all schools (usually a financial and practical impossibility), but *changing the conditions within which all schools operate*.

The critical insight captured in USAID's Education Reform Support studies is that achieving development success on a national level requires scaling up the *conditions* that facilitate successful activities within schools, rather than the *activities* themselves (Crouch, DeStefano, 1998).

Other reform projects take an opposite approach, and seek to work at scale from the beginning, addressing the incentives and conditions through policy reform, organizational capacity building, curriculum reform, teacher training, and similar national level interventions. The potential strength of this strategy is that policies can, in theory, fundamentally change the incentives and disincentives of the system, and affect the behavior of thousands of teachers and principals. In practice, however, there is a significant stretch between a regulation or policy and day-to-day teacher behavior in a classroom; policies frequently fail to reflect critical constraints confronted by teachers and principals. In practice, policy change almost always elicits unanticipated response at the school level, and therefore requires a robust feedback and adjustment mechanism. Effective implementation of a new policy on a national scale is an endeavor that requires considerable capacity and resources. For students, policy implementation happens on a school-by-school level. Under the best of circumstances, top-down development strategy takes a long time to show tangible results in the classroom.

The following checklist of the requirements for scaling up (World Bank, 2002) captures the essence of system improvement. However, as is often the case, a checklist may simply be stating the obvious, without providing useful guidance about how to achieve these goals.

Country commitment to improving policies, governances and institutions.

- Sound policies and committed leadership at the country level, supported by appropriate expenditure frameworks and effective budget execution.
- Community and country ownership is essential.

Adequate operational capacity to implement at all levels.

- Capacity of communities to participate effectively, and the right incentives, so that countries can translate sound policies and strong leadership into effective action.
- External support for change and capacity building.

Financial resources adequate to scale up programs that work.

- Cost structure M&E, hiring of staff, avoid high staff turnover Government needs to see advantage in scaling up.
- Many programs have yet to become comprehensive in either geographical coverage or context.
- Scaling up should depend on empirical evidence that the program works. A strong focus on results- accountability for learning and outcomes- so that policies and programs are built on empirical evidence of problems and solutions that work.

—Summarized from Development Effectiveness and Scaling Up: Lessons from Case Studies, World Bank Board Report (2002).

The issues of effectiveness, sustainability, capacity, scaling up, and ownership discussed above are all illustrations of a complex system, in which different aspects are mutually dependent and interrelated. Change can only take root when all aspects of the system support technical and pedagogical innovations. This implies that effective engagement in education reform requires more than a series of activities, but rather a coordinated systems approach. The following section discusses an approach to dealing with education as a system.

A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO EDUCATION REFORM: WHAT CONSTITUTES MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

Evaluations of aid to education usually focus on project activities, outcomes, and, to a lesser extent, impact. However, there is a growing recognition that the "process of change is as important as the immediate or quantifiable results of the change" (Samoff, 2001). In a background paper to the Joint Evaluation of Aid to Basic Education, Dr. Joel Samoff noted that some of the most important contributions to effective change were not the immediate outcomes, but in programs that "emphasize relationships rather than distinctions, reciprocal interactions rather than causality, and shorter-term proximate consequences rather than longer term impacts". From this perspective, meaningful change

might be seen in a more mature education system, with empirically based decision-making and systematic capacity development. This insightful discussion of the challenges of evaluating aid to education highlighted some key issues about effective education reform. Among the important insights in Dr. Samoff's paper (2001) are the following observations, which will be familiar to virtually everyone working in international education development.

- Education does not lend itself to a standard evaluation model that assumes a static and linear process of change that allows for clear analysis of dependent and independent variables. This model does not work well for education because education reform is inherently contextual. Education decisions can be made for political or bureaucratic reasons, donors can change priorities, and individual local circumstances dictate a lot of behavior change.
- If education reform is best understood as process rather than only outcomes, it is particularly problematic for such concepts as "best practices" and "lessons learned" because context determines relevance. The nature of politically and technically difficult reforms is that they are continually renegotiated and redefined.
- Simplifying findings (lessons learned) in order to generalize may lead to stating the obvious rather than developing useful guides to action.
- Finally, meaningful education system change is a long-term endeavor that is particularly difficult to assess within the short lifespan of a project.

A related work that provides insights into the process of system change in education is Michael Fullan's work on leadership for education change (Fullan, 2001). This work, based on his in-depth research on education system reform, emphasizes the contextual and dynamic nature of introducing change in the complex political-institutional environment of education. Fullan argues that change requires adaptive leadership to deal with six facets of the change process:

- It is not enough to innovate the most.
- It is not enough to have the best ideas.
- Appreciate the implementation dip.
- Redefine resistance.
- Reculturing is the name of the game.
- Never a checklist, always complexity.

—From Leading in a Culture of Change by Michael Fullan

The importance of these insights, both for donors and for national education leaders, is evident as one considers the experience in education reform in country after country. The best innovative ideas may be neither accepted nor sustained. Progress is uneven. The implementation dip that Fullan has found in all successful school reforms is inevitable when people struggle to apply new skills in which they are not proficient. The challenge for effective reform is both to recognize the potential for this dip, and to create support structures that provide the stability and continuity—and time - for reforms to work. The short-term focus on tangible results and predictable progress, on the part of both donors and politicians, leads to a tendency to declare failure prematurely, and to abandon or continually modify reforms. Alternatively, it can also result in a premature judgment of success.

Fullan's distinction between reculturing and restructuring is useful in explicitly recognizing that organizational reorganization alone is not sufficient to address the critical human aspects of change. Human behavior is influenced by powerful mental models of the ways things 'should' be. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of the human element, and how difficult this is to address. Reculturing happens not only in classrooms with teachers, but in school management with directors, oversight with supervisors and in administration at all levels.

When asked what the key is for enabling effective system change, many professional educators formulate the answer in terms of having the right people in the right place at the right time; as leadership; as vision and commitment; or some other very subjective (and difficult to replicate) human factor. Fullan acknowledges these truisms but goes further, devoting an entire chapter to his argument that not just the people, but also the relationships among people that make a difference.

If the traditional measures of objectives, outcomes, and quantitative impacts are not particularly informative for system change, what process measures might be useful? One approach has been taken by studies that seek to identify the characteristics of countries with strong and rapidly improving education systems. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 identified three common characteristics found in countries with impressive educational outcomes (Cuba, Korea, Canada, and Finland).

- The first characteristic is an institutional environment that values teachers, and demonstrates this value through on-going professional development, high esteem for the profession, strong teacher support, and a commitment to teacher quality even in the face of teacher shortages.

- The second characteristic is continuity of underlying policy, even as strategies adjust, to reduce the impact of changes in political leadership or management.
- Finally, the third factor is a high level of public commitment to education, which is a function of political will, social cohesion, and leadership. In the model countries, this was manifested by national characteristics: "Korea's determination to become and remain globally competitive, Cuba's will to defend the revolution, Canada's belief that its strength as a nation lies in cultural diversity, and Finland's deep commitment to human development and equality" (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005, UNESCO).

Fullan's work emphasizes that progress is measured in understanding and insight rather than only in action steps. Applying this metric is unquestionably challenging, but it is also intriguing. A more mature institutional structure, on that has established procedures that rely on evidence and are flexible enough to make adjustments to achieve goals is a worthwhile metric.

These insights are similar to a more recent study by the McKinsey consulting group that found that the most consistently effective and successful education systems shared certain key strategies. The McKinsey report also identified the priority emphasis on teacher quality, a well coordinated and integrated system of in-service, on-going professional development and teacher support, and a determined focus on those students who are having problems learning (McKinsey, 2007). While it should be acknowledged that the countries in the McKinsey report have characteristics that are not found in most developing countries, the important fact is that these changes are of a different nature than the input-output structure of standard project designs.

Education and Complexity: Understanding the Problem

These studies tell us that some of the critical factors in achieving educational excellence are not well captured by quantitative measures of project accomplishment—such as number of teachers trained, curriculum revised, principals trained, or model school education results. Such tangible contributions to education are a necessary—but not a sufficient—condition for improving the quality of education. Education system improvement is necessarily more complex than supply side responses, addressing issues of demand, economic context, political considerations, and institutional support. This requires thinking of education reform as a dynamic process of change rather than as a linear process of a production function.

Table: Simple, Complicated, and Complex Problems

SIMPLE	COMPLICATED	COMPLEX
A recipe for apple pie	Sending a rocket to the moon	Raising a child
The recipe is essential.	Formulae are critical and necessary.	Formulae have limited application.
Recipes are tested to assure easy replication.	Sending one rocket to the moon increases assurance that the next will succeed.	Raising one child provides experience, but no assurance of success with the next.
No particular expertise is required, but cooking expertise increases success.	High levels of expertise in a variety of fields are necessary for success.	Expertise can contribute, but is neither necessary nor sufficient to assure success.
Recipes produce standardized products.	Rockets are similar in critical ways.	Every child is unique, and must be understood as an individual.
The best recipes give good results every time.	There is a high degree of certainty about the outcome.	The experience of and influences on each child will be different.
Optimistic approach to problem solving.	Optimistic approach to problem solving.	Optimistic approach to problem solving.
		Uncertainty of outcome remains.

Source: adapted from Glouberman and Zimmerman, 2002

Recent research into complexity theory provides insights into the nature of the education system as a complex, dynamic system. The following formulation seeks to distinguish between different types of problems, as a basis for designing and evaluating interventions (Glouberman and Zimmerman, 2002). In developing an approach to developmental evaluation, Michael Patton has used this structure to inform the response to challenges of planning and evaluating progress in a non-linear system.

Using this framework, education is clearly a complex problem in that progress is highly context specific, is very dynamic as different factors can influence outcomes at any time, and is distinctly non-linear. This powerful conceptual model is useful in thinking about interventions that are designed to affect education. Of course, a complex system like education contains elements of both simple and complicated problems as well. Some specific education problems do lend themselves to a linear, causal process, such as providing training to teachers or distributing learning materials. Some aspects are complicated, requiring multiple lines of expertise, such as curriculum design, assessment, and information systems.

The multiple layers and levels of education system change are more than engineering problems. A too-narrow focus on individual elements obscures the broader reality that progress in any of the simple and complicated elements must take place in the context of a complex environment. Education is complex because there are no wholly technical solutions. It is complex in the sense of working in a highly dynamic landscape, in which each action is judged not only by technical merits, but also in terms of its interaction with other components and stakeholders. Politically and institutionally, education has the challenge of working simultaneously at a national system level (policies, procedures, incentives, and capacity in many technical areas) and at the classroom level with teacher and students; each classroom and school.

In this sense, education is usefully understood from the perspective of political phenomena—leadership, politics, interest groups, as well as from the very human perspective of individual teachers, students, parents, principals, and others adapting to new ideas. System change happens when political, institutional, technical, and human dimensions are aligned to enable behavior change. The fact that education is so complex means that effective strategy and planning is an essential means of creating order and priority out of complexity.

Understanding Systems Thinking

The foundations of systems thinking are understandable, and reflect common sense knowledge about the world. The challenge of applying systems thinking comes less from the complexity of theory than from a traditionally linear and rational approach to problem solving that breaks problems into small, distinct events, one cause leading to a single effect/ Such linear thinking may obscure the complexity of the underlying system.

Contemporary systems thinking sees the underlying structure of a system as determinative of how it responds to change. Economists usually look for the underlying structures in terms of incentives and disincentives that influence how people respond to stimulus. Physicians find the underlying structure in the response of an immune system to a virus. Ecologists identify the natural balancing forces of predators and prey, symbiotic and parasitic relationships, evolution, and even climate. Each of these systems operates within sets of rules, enabling them to respond to events, adapt, and reestablish an equilibrium.

> What is a system? A system is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. The system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the system response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and that response is seldom simple in the real world.
>
> —From *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by Donella H. Meadows

Basic principles of systems thinking can be usefully applied to education reform. For this purpose the authors have adapted here concepts Donella H. Meadows presents in her 2008 book *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*.

- A system is more than the sum of its parts. Information is one of the key factors influencing the connections and relationships between parts in the system.
- The function, or purpose, of the system drives system behavior. Sometimes the actual function is not obvious, and may be different from the stated purpose
- The structure of the system is a source of behavior.
- The foundations of a system are stocks and flows. Stocks are the parts that you can see, count, and measure at any given time. Stocks can be physical—like teachers, books, schools, but they can also be intangible factors like information, beliefs, mental models, self-confidence, goodwill, or credibility. Flows are the elements that change stocks over time, which can also be physical (new schools, graduates of teacher colleges) or intangible (new information, new models, experiences).
- Feedback loops are causal connections between stocks and flows. Feedback loops can work to balance the system and return it to equilibrium, providing both a source of stability and a source of resistance to change. Reinforcing loops can strengthen existing trends, which can lead to growth or collapse.

PLACES TO INTERVENE IN A SYSTEM

1. Transcending paradigms
2. Paradigms
3. Goals
4. Self-organization: evolution
5. Rules: incentives, sanctions
6. Information flows
7. Reinforcing feedback loops
8. Balancing feedback loops
9. Delays: length of time to affect change
10. Stock and flow structure
11. Buffers: size of stabilizing stocks
12. Numbers: parameters, such as subsidies, taxes, standards

—From *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by Donella H. Meadows

Stocks act as buffers, or shock absorbers, in systems. In education, the concept of stocks also applies to individuals. In an education system, the stock of existing teachers with pre-existing skills, knowledge, and attitudes is an inherent change buffer when the replacement flow of new teachers entering the system may be less than 2 percent of the stock each year. Teachers, principles, ministers, parents all have skills they are comfortable with, beliefs about the right way of doing things, and attitudes that reflect culture, education, and history. These stocks are not immutable—but they are resistant to quick change.

A reinforcing loop can reward the winners to make them even more competitive, and disadvantage the losers. In education, this pattern is seen in resource allocation, school quality, access for disadvantaged groups, and many other areas.

Relationships in a system may be linear (a constant proportion between cause and effect), but many relationships are non-linear. Systems cannot be wholly separated—the world is a continuum. We define a particular system (or sub-system) depending on the purpose of the discussion. The concentric systems affecting education extend from the classroom, school, community, district, region, country, politics and history, and international trends. Systems can be managed for several different and related purposes: productivity, stability, resilience, and self-organization (evolution). In spite of the feedback loops, there are limits to resilience. A diverse system with multiple pathways and redundancies is more stable and less vulnerable to external shock than a uniform system with little diversity.

In social systems, the underlying structure is not an accident, but arises out of the influence of interest groups, power politics, culture, history, geography, or any number of other factors. The input that is most important to a system at any given time is the one that is the most limiting.

How does this understanding of systems relate specifically to aid effectiveness and education reform? As a starting point, some insights can be ventured.

- Aid to system reform cannot be effective unless 'how and why' the system functions is taken into account.
- Tangible elements such as schools, books, desks, teachers, principals, policies, parents, and organizations are visible and easy to identify, but can obscure the intangible aspects of the system—reputation, pride, credibility, academic prowess, beliefs—that are important parts of the 'stocks.'
- Education system reform must focus on the interconnection among the elements, the flows and feedback mechanisms, and the rules of the game that affect relationships. These may include examinations, standards, admission process, teacher selection and promotion process, or financial flows. Information is an important connector among these and a valuable point of leverage.
- The system must be defined broadly enough to recognize all of the influences that affect education outcomes and decision processes.
- A focus on system process is important to identify points of leverage—feedback loops, goals, information flows, rules, etc.

Among the many aspects of systems thinking that are useful for education, three ideas are particularly relevant to education. One is that systems are resilient, which combines both stability and resistance to change. The second is that systems have the capacity for self-organization—to create new structures, to learn, to adapt, and to diversify. The third is that a focus on the structure and dynamics is essential—the stocks, the feedback loops, and the rules of the game. Effective education reform will define goals, use information as leverage, and encourage feedback loops that reinforce positive behaviors.

An Analytical Framework for Systems Change in Education

EQUIP2's conceptual framework is an analytical tool based on a theory of change in education. This framework does not attempt to identify what specific changes in curriculum, teacher training, school management, or financing are needed to improve education quality. Instead, this framework applies systems thinking to better understand how to introduce and foster sustainable change in the complex, dynamic system that is education. The framework is based on the interaction among three major dimensions of the education system—political, institutional, and technical. These dimensions are not independent elements, but rather are interactive factors that both create and respond to change. The EQUIP2 framework is used for analyzing issues and developing strategies for system improvement, which emphasizes alignment and coordination among the three dimensions of system change.

> Systems happen all at once. They are connected not just in one direction, but in many directions simultaneously.
>
> —From *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by Donella H. Meadows

To understand how reforms—or changes—take place in a complex system it is important to understand how the elements of the system relate to each other. Effective reforms take hold in a system through interaction across political, institutional, and technical dimensions at multiple levels. Each school and classroom requires an effective teaching and learning process that is supported by effective school management and governance. The performance of teachers and principals is, in turn, a product of institutional conditions that create incentives, provide resources, establish policies and procedures, and define skills and outcomes. Likewise, the institutional conditions—policies, resource levels and allocation, roles and responsibilities—do not arise in a vacuum. Institutional conditions and policies are shaped by factors that may be cultural, historical, political, economic, or the result of power imposed by interest groups. Changes in policies and practices almost inevitably require initiative either from the political dimension, or from powerful outside forces.

The change model mooted in this report focuses on the interaction of the various elements of reform, rather than on the details of the individual elements (which policy, how many resources, what leader). The intent of the model is not to provide a comprehensive picture of all activities required to address needed changes in specific situations, but to analyze a situation and to identify how changes in one dimension might affect another dimension. The elements of the model are not a 'to do' list, nor are they intended to demonstrate a chain reaction in which one action inevitably leads to another.

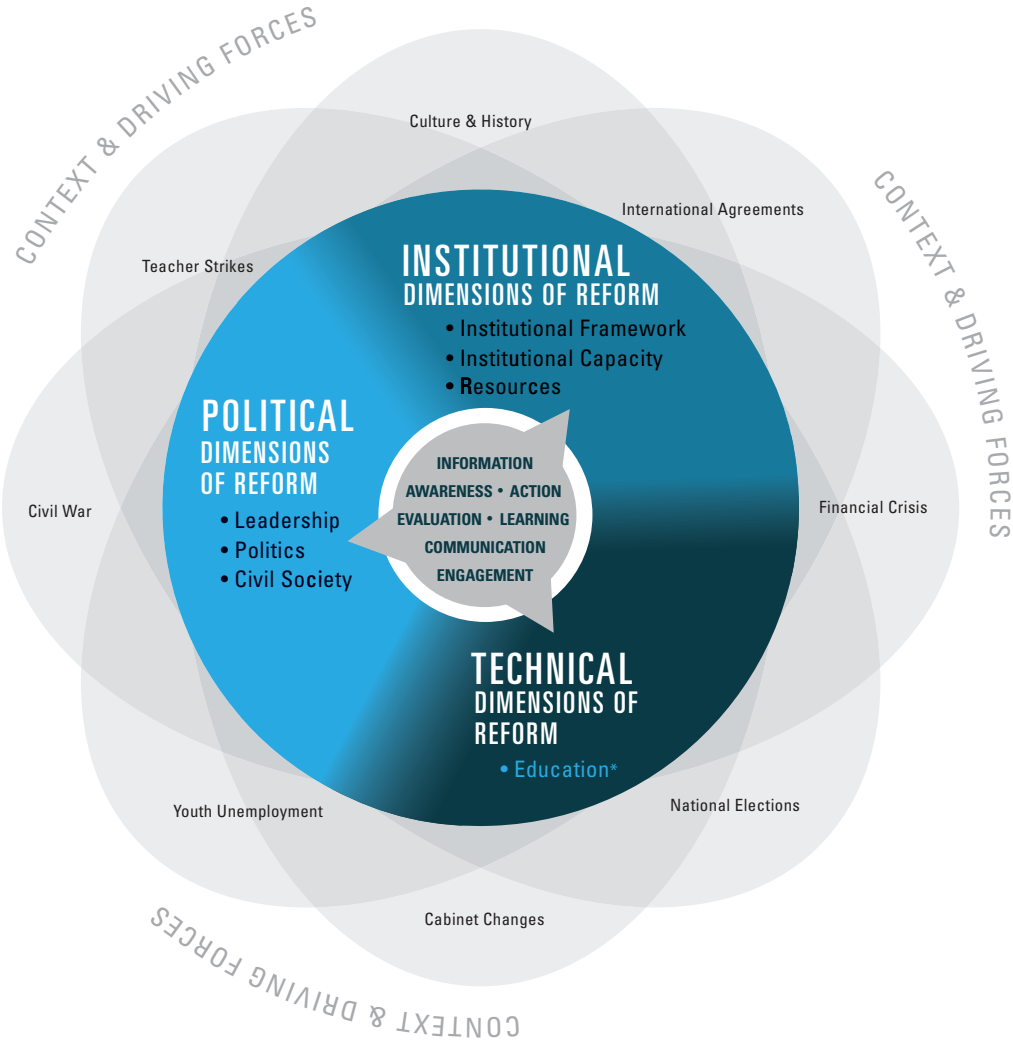
In thinking about the systems model, it is useful to keep in mind a few basic dynamics:

- Systems happen all at once. Each element is an existing, active force that influences other elements all the time.
- The elements of the system are simultaneously connected in all directions.
- The system works as it does not because of the individual elements, but because of the relationship among the elements. Changes in each dimension affect the others, and change moves through the system in dynamic manner.
- System change is non-linear. The fact of the system functioning as a series of on-going interactions among the elements highlights the importance of the factors at the center of the model. Information, evaluation, and communication are the tools to link the different dimensions of reform.

Technical dimensions of education include the core elements of the school and classroom activities implemented by the central actors: teachers, principals, and parents. Among the technical dimensions that are widely recognized as being essential to improved education quality are: school leadership; teacher professional development (pedagogy and content knowledge); effective curriculum and materials; school management; parent involvement and commitment; clear standards, high expectations, and accountability; consistent, continuous, and effective school support (technical supervision) services that provide targeted assistance to instructional problems; and a focus on student learning outcomes. Much of the engagement of the international community is focused on finding improved technical strategies for education.

The technical dimensions of education that affect the behavior of teachers and students, and determine what and how well students learn are decisively influenced by the conditions within which they work, or the parameters of the environment.

EQUIP2 Education Systems Reform Framework



* Such as pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, school management, parental involvement, evidence-based decision making

Institutional dimensions of education establish parameters which include elements that create incentives (or disincentives) for effective implementation of the technical solutions. This includes policy of all types (decentralization, teacher professional development and assignment, accountability, assessment, etc), the procedures and tools for implementing the policies (without which nothing happens), and the resources and capacity needed to implement them.

Together, the institutional dimensions determine the 'rules of the game' in the sense that they establish the explicit and implicit incentives and disincentives that determine the behavior of individual actors in the system.

- **Institutional Framework** includes existing policies, procedures, norms, incentives, and mental models that may support or encourage reforms, that work against them, or that are irrelevant. For example, decentralization may require regulatory changes to enable parent committees to manage or raise funds, to hire/fire teachers, or even to congregate. Other policies affecting how principals and teachers behave may include funding formulas, career and promotion ladders, salary structure, and teacher assignment. The institutional framework establishes the rewards—and consequences—of particular actions. In addition to explicit policies, this category may include less tangible elements of institutional culture such as the prevailing mental models of what a teacher should be, what the role of a principal is, or what parents should be allowed to do.

- **Institutional Capacity** is the core ability of organizations (ministry, schools, parent groups, or provincial governments) to implement the specific changes. This includes the numbers of qualified teachers and other professionals, levels of specific skills needed (management skills, financial management, planning), and the depth of capacity in relation to the requirements of the policies/procedures. Reforms may require a degree and depth of key skills, such as management skills, that are in short supply, and for which there may not be a 'quick fix' or substitution. Effective system reform may require substantive capacity at all levels—school, district, and national.

- **Resources** needed to implement reform are widely recognized as a critical constraint in terms of financial, material, and human resources. As with the issue of capacity, it is necessary to explicitly analyze and understand the resource requirements for successful implementation at a national level. This may include school financing, funding for teacher training and regular supervision, learning materials, or a wide range of other activities. Donors must recognize that effectively deploying resources gaps that can be solved with money is only one part of the puzzle.

Political dimensions capture the essence of ownership and establish the foundation for long-term sustainability. It creates a basis for pushing through difficult policy changes, but also can respond to the pressures for success at the school level. Choices about policy, resource levels and allocation, education philosophy, and organizational power are intensely political. Policy decisions

may or may not be influenced by the technical superiority of a technical solution, but will always be influenced by the political calculation of winners and losers. The one constant is that political and leadership change is inevitable—a challenge for reform is to deal with that change.

- **Leadership** in education reform includes leadership at both the national and local levels, the role of civil society, and support of families and communities, and business. There are several facets of this dimension, which is highly interactive with the other dimensions, and in fact is the essential enabler of sustainability and change.

- **Politics** can work for or against effective education reform. The most effective reforms are those that become part of a national agenda rather than the agenda of a particular government or political party. Although strong national leadership and political can be powerful drivers for reform in the short run, excessive reliance on a single champion creates vulnerabilities over the long term.

- **Civil Society** influences education reform in profound ways. The education sector incorporates ideology, interest groups, ethnic and linguistic differences, geographic disparities, job security for thousands of employees, parents' hopes for their children, and a gamut of societal interests. Political and economic tradeoffs are inevitable. Effective reform efforts create a reinforcing web of support—among national and local leaders, across political lines, within civil society institutions and business leaders, and among parents and communities.

Driving forces influence all three dimensions of reform. This includes the larger forces that can shake up or energize a society, and may facilitate or impede change. The driving forces affecting education may be international agreements such as EFA or MCA, which draw national attention to key issues, and are backed by national commitments, or even strong donor pressure to adopt certain reforms. They may be general global influences, such as globalization, competitiveness, or the war against terror. Some dominant influences are entirely local, whether they result from natural disaster (earthquake, hurricane), economic collapse, civil war, or economic boom. Driving forces may also be constant or underlying elements such as culture, language, family or community dynamics, or history. Any of these influences can encourage a society to adopt changes,

> ... Neither the academics nor the practitioners have given sufficient attention to the need for solutions that are sensitive to the on-going need for learning and change, for monitoring and adjustment, and for credibility and dependability.
>
> —From "The Social Agenda and Politics of Reform in Latin America" by Merilee Grindle

and to create space for substantive reform. In some cases, the most difficult reforms are only possible in the face of driving forces.

The space at the center of the EQUIP2 framework is the essential process of education system reform—it is the space for *learning* on both an individual and organizational level. These tools can help to create reinforcing feedback loops, and mutually reinforcing activities that address weaknesses to create a productive dynamic out of the political, institutional, and technical dimensions of reform. This is perhaps the point of greatest leverage and value added to facilitate the interaction between technical innovations, institutional responses, and political empowerment. It may also be an area of substantial underinvestment, both by donors and by the countries themselves.

An effective policy dialogue strategy that is a process linking information, awareness, engagement and commitment, action and assessment in an ongoing spiral of improvement leading to improved results is built out of multiple, interlocking interventions. *Information* includes new research, data development, collection and presentation; *awareness* includes activities leading to the visibility, analysis and understanding of issues in the health and education sectors and their inter-dependencies; *engagement and commitment* include the active recognition by actors of their role and responsibility in facilitating change; action refers to the changes in behaviors, competencies, institutions and structures that lead to desired outcomes; and *assessment* involves producing information about action and results that can be turned into useful guidelines for a new cycle. As the cycle progresses, information and learning from experience enable continuous improvement in the quality and quantity of interventions. In this framework, communications, social marketing and advocacy are mostly about translating information into engagement; *capacity building* is about building the bases and systems for translating engagement into effective action; and *research and monitoring and evaluation* translate outcomes into information for accountability and for a new cycle of change.

The implications of this model, and of the underlying research that defines education as a complex adaptive system in a sensitive political-institutional context, can be summarized as follows:

- Education reform does not have a purely technical solution. Improved system performance in education is a mix of technical, institutional incentives, political support, and human factors. The role of outside donors and players must be appropriate to this context.

- There are no magic bullets. Paradoxically, while virtually everyone accepts this truism, the underlying structure of many development programs implicitly assumes a single solution that looks a lot like a silver bullet. Effective development requires not a recipe per se, but rather some known principles about learning, human behavior change, and organizational development that need to be adapted and modified.

- There are many routes to improved performance. There is a strong element of discovery, of revision and modification of plans. The process of organizational learning is in effect a reinforcing feedback loop that uses information, indicators of success, and reflection that enables a process consistent with Easterly's "seeker" mentality.

- Having a proven approach is not enough. Even the fact that a Minister may agree on an approach is not enough—it must be accepted by others throughout the system, internalized into the operating infrastructure and policies, expertise developed at all levels, and supported by incentives and accountability. The more diverse stakeholders who value an approach, the more likely it is to be sustained.

- The education system is made up of many individuals. Each school is a distinct entity—change happens on a retail basis, not a wholesale basis.

- As in any complex system, there is a strong tendency to the status quo. Forces at both the personal and system level gravitate against change. So a common phenomenon is to have the appearance of change that ultimately has little impact in the core activity of teaching and learning. Big changes are gradually eroded into little changes. An offsetting dynamic feedback loop is required to brings the focus back on the ultimate goals.

- Change is not a binary choice—reform or no reform. Change, by its nature, does not stop, but continues to evolve. The challenge is to continue to build, and not let the next change derail the previous improvements. In a political environment, this is challenge is best addressed through establishing broad-based support and clear evidence of effectiveness.

2 Lessons from Country Case Studies

EGYPT | EL SALVADOR | NAMIBIA | NICARAGUA | ZAMBIA

These case studies look at education reform efforts over the long term in several recipient countries, reviewing the overall process, and focusing on one or two main areas of reform to track progress. The methodology included document review and interviews with key stakeholders in the Ministry, civil society, and donor community. The review draws heavily on project documents and studies available to the researchers. Each case study used the conceptual systems framework for reform as the central lens for analyzing the dynamics of reform.

The case studies do not represent an evaluation of specific projects, programs, or reform strategies, and the report does not seek to stipulate what policies should be adopted, but to articulate what enables sustainable policy and system change as identified goals, and how external assistance can support such change. The study looks at the political, institutional, and technical dimensions of reforms over two decades. Five major USAID investments are included in the review. The studies are not comprehensive, in terms of reviewing all reform efforts, and are certainly not a comprehensive review of the numerous national and international projects in this period.

The makeup of the sample for the case studies was determined by several factors. First, the five selected countries provide a diversity of country contexts, geography, and educational challenges. Second, the countries given priority are those in which one or more EQUIP2 partner organizations were currently active, and ideally had been involved for much of the study period. This provided the researchers with access to documents and individuals that might otherwise have been difficult or costly to obtain. The relatively limited resources available for the study dictated this process.

SUMMARY OF COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

The study reviews the experience in five countries in the approximate period from 1990 to 2009: El Salvador, Egypt, Namibia, Nicaragua, and Zambia. Each of these countries has significant contextual and historical events affecting the process, as is the case in all countries. El Salvador and Nicaragua were both

emerging from violent left-right civil conflict in the early 1990s. Namibia was also emerging from a lengthy war for independence, and became an independent country in 1990. Zambia and Egypt did not have civil wars, but each faced economic and political challenges.

In terms of education reforms, there are many similarities among the countries during the period studied:

> All were influenced by the major international influences of the period; in particular the Education for All initiatives in 1990 and 2000, as well as the consensus in the donor community for reforms involving decentralization and community participation.
>
> Each of the countries has sought to introduce some form of school or community-based management, and has made one or more efforts to include administrative or financial decentralization.

Other common goals of education initiatives include curriculum reform, teacher professional development, standards for and assessment of learning outcomes at the national or classroom level, girls' education, and EMIS and information systems. Specific approaches to these goals, and the reform processes and key factors that influenced them in each country, differ — and reflect the political and institutional environment at particular times.

It is also worth noting that the issue of school quality and learning outcomes was on the agenda of all countries, in spite of having been undertaken during the EFA era's major international focus and reporting on improving access. While all of the countries did prioritize access issues, education quality was not ignored. Many of the reforms, particularly decentralization, school based management, curriculum reform, and teacher training, were explicitly focused on quality improvement.

	El Salvador	Egypt	Namibia	Nicaragua	Zambia
Major Reforms	School-based management, community participation, decentralization, testing and assessment, curriculum reform, teacher training, strategic planning, information and research, pedagogical supervisors	School-based management and community participation, teacher certification and management, decentralization,	School-based management, community participation, School improvement planning and school self assessment, learner centered education and continuous assessment, learner assessment, teacher training, circuit and school based training	School-based management (Autonomous schools), multi-grade active schools, community involvement, intensive facilitators (supervisors), curriculum reform, teacher training,	Community schools, establishment of district education boards, SWAP, sector planning
Impact	Increased enrollment and completion, improved test scores, national EDUCO program, comprehensive national assessment system, comprehensive strategic plans	Increased enrollment, improved equity, and successful small-scale projects. Policy reform accelerated over past four years, but implementation is in early stages.	Significant development and improvement of education in disadvantaged North improved teaching and improved test scores. Scaled-up interventions of school based management.	Increased enrollment at primary and secondary, innovative Autonomous Schools program.	Increased enrollment at primary level, gender equity improved, institutional capacity to district level, learning outcomes stable despite rapid expansion
Scaling up	National level implementation of most programs, currently expanding PEI/PEA, RQT	None to date	SIP/ SSA adopted in all schools in North, expanded by national policy to all schools in 2005. Implementation dip	Active Schools increased from 40 to 6000 schools and accepted as MOE policy, Currently expanding – implementation dip	Community schools increased to 3,000 and accepted by MOE as part of system. 72 district education boards established
Ownership – country led program	Strong broad-based country ownership, strong leadership, Strategic plan dominated agenda	Uneven, growing ownership but still heavily donor-driven, top-down ownership	Bottom-up and top-down, primarily in 6 northern regions. Deep personal ownership.	Country initiatives, dependent on donors, weak national consensus	Grassroots and donor driven, increasing leadership of MOE

Egypt: *Summary*

COUNTRY CONTEXT

One of the most dominant forces determining the path of education reforms in Egypt in the last 20 years has been the political relationship with militant Islamic groups. In 1978, Egypt signed the Camp David Peace Accords with Israel and was subsequently condemned by other Arab nations. Following the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat by a militant Islamic group, Husni Mubarak, a member of the National Democratic Party, was approved as president by a national referendum in 1981. The Mubarak period (1981 to the date of report) has been characterized by a strong executive branch, regular, and significant financial support from multilateral and bilateral organizations and regular, sometimes violent, challenge to its rule from the Muslim Brotherhood and other groups. Elections in the 2000s have seen increases in opposition representation in the legislature; in 2006, a sizeable number of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were elected.

REFORM GOALS

Unlike the other instances, the 1981 political transition was not a catalyst for a major education reform program. The implementation of education reform in Egypt has ebbed and flowed over 20 years, influenced by the relationship between the Government of Egypt (GOE) and the Muslim Brotherhood and associated groups, international organizations' programs, and EFA. Though several activities and strategies were first articulated in the 1990s, it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that the technical reforms explored in this case study—decentralization, community participation, and strategic planning—gained momentum.

Over the reform period, most stakeholders made general commitments to decentralization, though national government officials tended to stress the need to gradually introduce such reform. USAID/Egypt's commitment to decentralization grew stronger earlier than the MOE's, though most USAID

reform support during the 1980s and 1990s targeted central government units. The most significant and productive efforts to introduce decentralization began with the Alexandria Pilot Project (2002-2004) and the Education Reform Program (ERP: 2004-2009), both of which targeted those governorates that were seen to be more conducive to decentralization and other reform initiatives.

Increased community participation in education was supported by the Egyptian government even before 1981, primarily in the form of land donations, financial support, and volunteer labor (e.g., for school repairs). A 1993 ministerial decree called for parent and teacher councils to participate in school governance. A 1999 decree promoted an education-related role for NGOs, while also restricting their 'political' activities, and a 2002 decree reiterated NGOs' education role, while also loosening restrictions on their activities and allowing them to receive funds from non-Egyptian entities. As was the case with decentralization, the reform-conducive regions were targeted for pilot work in the Community School Project, New Schools Project, Alexandria Pilot Project, and the Education Reform Program. Initially, community participation was narrowly defined by stakeholders as increasing donations and voluntary contributions.

Support for decentralization and community participation was framed in terms of democratization and improving educational quality, particularly in the context of international organization-funded projects. By the early and mid-2000s, successful implementation of decentralization and community participation processes reinforced the use of these approaches in the design and implementation of new projects.

Strategies

From the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of approaches implemented by USAID and UNICEF projects, among others, received explicit support from the GOE and put decentralization and community participation into practice. Among these were the community school and new school programs, girls' education, boards of trustees, and other forms of school based management and community participation.

During the period under review (1981-2007), Egypt experienced sporadic movement toward increased *decentralization*, moving from calls for deconcentration of responsibility in the early 1980s to restrictions on local decision-making authority in the 1990s, and back toward delegation and devolution after 2001. The MOE first delegated responsibilities for education reform to the governor of Alexandria in 2001, supported by the USAID-funded Alexandria Pilot Project. In 2003, similar delegation of responsibilities followed

in Aswan, Bani Suef, Cairo, Fayoum, Minia, and Qena in anticipation of support from the USAID-funded Education Reform Program. With the development of its National Strategic Plan for Education during 2006–2007, the Egyptian government and other stakeholders committed to more school-level reform, financial, and decision-making responsibility. During 2006–2007, high level, inter-ministerial committees charted the course for financial and administrative decentralization pilots in a small number of governorates.

The calls for greater *community participation* also represented a struggle between education reformers and political caution. Throughout the 1990s, the reforms alternated between action toward deeper forms of community involvement and reactions that blocked such reforms for fear of excessive militant influence. In the years since 2000, various central government actions sought to mobilize (and to control) community involvement through Parent and Teacher Councils and Boards of Trustees at the school and local levels. However, throughout this entire period, most of the substantive work was limited to select governorates and supported by donor-funded projects, including the UNICEF Community Schools, USAID New Schools Program, Alexandria Pilot Project, and Education Reform Program). Similarly, NGO involvement in schooling tended to be greater in governorates and communities in which international organization-funded projects were operating.

Impact

The Egyptian education system had substantial success in expanding access and improving equity in this 20-year period. Universal primary education was largely achieved, and secondary enrollment increased to 88 percent. Primary completion was maintained at very high levels and dropout was reduced dramatically. Gender equity also improved substantially in the period.

Throughout the 1990s, progress from the perspective of international donors was counted in terms of visible projects that demonstrated some effective practices such as girls' education, new schools, standards, and community schools. These initiatives were primarily small-scale demonstration activities whose impact was limited by the continuing system-wide inertia. Major reforms on issues such as decentralization had fits and starts. Significant progress on major issues began with the Alexandria decentralization pilot project in 2001, a highly visible project that set in motion a reform dynamic. The success of the Alexandria pilot fostered an outgrowth of like-minded efforts and reform leaders. In 2003, the Ministry of Education granted seven governorates the authority to pilot more decentralized systems in selected districts, and adopted the National Standards, representing a major step in reforming the management and governance of Egypt's educational

system. In the same year, the USAID provided a substantial program—the Education Reform Program—with assistance at both the system and school levels to help implement the reforms. Over the next two years, reforms struggled to take hold during a period in which the country underwent two changes of Minister of Education, replacement of several governors, and other changes. The period of 2005 to 2008 saw an impressive increase in planning and policy initiatives. Significant progress on decentralization is only now beginning to be incorporated in the institutional framework of policies and procedures, and policy implementation is in its early stages. After uneven initiatives in the 1990s, a deliberate and cautious process began with the pilot effort in Alexandria in 2001. Authority was delegated to six additional governorates in 2003, and there has been a growing momentum of substantial policy reforms since 2005. Between 2006 and 2008, at least eight major policy reforms were formulated affecting community participation and authority, financial decentralization, quality assurance, teacher development, and decentralization for school spending authority. However, the implementation of these reforms is only just starting with a small-scale pilot of financial transfers to schools.

Development of strategic planning processes followed a similar pattern. Strategic planning was initiated on a pilot basis by ERP first in one, and then in seven governorates before becoming a national initiative. The National Strategic Plan not only was coordinated bi-directionally with the seven governorate planning process, but also facilitated strategic planning initiatives in all other governorates. The expansion of the strategic planning process is an example of scaling up of a process and planning mentality rather than a specific intervention.

The accelerating momentum of key reforms in planning, decentralization, and community participation was made possible by the confluence of several key factors. The successful and highly visible pilot program in Alexandria was critical for several reasons. Initially, the experience provided a degree of confidence to senior policymakers about the reforms, which enabled the 2003 decision to extend limited authority to six other governors who had the confidence of the Minister of Education. Changes in leadership in the MOE and governorates over the next two years slowed progress, but in 2005 the leaders of the Alexandria pilot were named to the key positions of Minister of Education and Minister of Local Government.

These changes coincided with ERP providing technical and financial support for decentralization, which was managed by the same USAID project officer who had implemented the Alexandria reforms with the new Minister. Rounding out the circle of relationships, the new Minister of Education named a senior Egyptian

educator working as an ERP senior technical specialist as his core advisor for strategic planning and decentralization. With these actions, the USAID supported Alexandria pilot created the technical, personal, and institutional foundation for further reforms.

Further indicating a growing national consensus on education reform, a 2007 EQUIP2 policy assessment team found strong support for substantive reforms across political figures, national party leadership, civil society, thought leaders, and intellectuals. ERP supported implementation of 10 policy actions in 2008 and targeted seven for 2009. While action was not limited to decentralization, financial decentralization and increased retention at the school of fees stand out. These actions built on earlier school-level work supporting training of school boards and teachers to support school-based reform, including school self-assessment, school improvement planning, and preparations for accreditation and quality assurance activities. Assessments of school standards, management practices, and student learning and critical thinking provide relevant measures of both impact and issues in implementing the reforms. Reforms supporting the professional development of teachers through the development of a Teachers' Academy and Teachers' Cadre Law (setting universal standards for a cadre of teachers) are addressing some fundamental systemic constraints to effective utilization of the teacher corps.

Egypt Education Indicators

Indicator	1991	1999/2000	2006
Number of Primary Students	-	8,086,000	9,988,000
GER Primary	94%	102%	105%
NER Primary	86%	94%	96%
Completion Primary	-	97.3%	97.5%
Survival to Grade 5	97%	99%	94%
GER Secondary	-	82%	88%
Teacher:Pupil Ratio	24:1	23:1	27:1
Gender Equity Ratio (Girls:Boys)—Primary	.83	.91	.95
Repetition Rate—Primary	9.1%	6.0%	3.1%
Education as % of Government Budget	-	-	13%
Education as % of GNP	-	-	4.2%
$ Per pupil current spending	-	-	-

CASE ANALYSIS: DIMENSIONS OF REFORM

Technical Dimensions

Pilot projects in the 1990s supported by multilateral donors and the MOE offered new models through which decentralized and participatory approaches and capacity-building activities supported increased access to basic education, especially for girls, in some of Egypt's poorest governorates. These approaches were expanded upon in subsequent programs, including the new schools program, and, along with improving quality and developing a knowledge infrastructure, were highlighted in the 2002 National Democratic Party Education Reform Policy. With the development of its National Strategic Plan for Education during 2006 and 2007, the Egyptian government and other stakeholders committed to more school-level authority and responsibility in relation to school-based reform (including school self-assessment, school improvement planning, and preparations for accreditation and quality assurance activities). To measure impact and identify issues in implementing the reforms, the MOE used assessments of school standards, management practices, and student learning and critical thinking. During the same period, the development of teacher standards, professional development, and career tracks further evidenced the reform momentum and its link to supporting quality and management at the decentralized level.

Institutional Dimensions

The legislative framework for *decentralization,* established in the 1981 Education Law, echoed earlier definitions of the division of responsibilities between the central MOE and the governorates, emphasizing the overarching authority of the center.[1] Project activities during the 1980s and 1990s contributed to organizational and personnel capacity development especially at the central level, and at the local level in select governorates. During these decades no significant decrees or laws that promoted decentralization were issued. In fact, MOE actions in the 1990s *reinforced* the central power by purging personnel and materials, and specifying a dress code.

The 2001 and 2003 ministerial decrees granting governors of Alexandria and six other governorates authority over educational reform reflected an increased focus on implementing decentralization. This momentum was also signaled in the National Democratic Party's 2002 "Education Reform Policy" statement, the educational management section of the 2003 "National Education Standards,"

1 For example, the 1883 provincial councils statute, the 1939 technical zones decree, and the 1960 Local Administrative Law; (see Abraham and Hozayn, 2006)

the 2004 MOE report on "Reforming Pre-University Education Programs, and the institutionalization of decentralization program of the 2007 national "Strategic Plan for Education." Paralleling and reinforcing the words in these documents were a variety of capacity development, organizational restructuring, planning, and piloting activities. One of the most important institutional factors at this time was the inter-Ministerial committee, which focused on administrative and financial decentralization pilots in 2007. The 2008 elaboration of policies furthering financial decentralization to schools appear to support the institutionalization of these pilot activities in the Egyptian system.

However, at the same time decentralization was being supported by some actions, other policies were actually strengthening central government authority and responsibility. While the 2003 national standards identified indicators for managers at various levels of the system, they were also, in effect, centrally defining how administrators, teachers, students, and the community should function. Though the 2006 law establishing the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation defines a role for school-level and other personnel to participate in the process, it is a centrally defined framework and process designed to shape how schools operate.

A particular challenge in decentralizing education is that of giving control of financial decisions to regions or schools instead of to national or Ministry-level authorities. Beginning in 2006, the Ministry of Finance initiated inter-ministerial discussions aimed at developing and piloting financial decentralization in selected sites, subject to close evaluation and monitoring. Nevertheless, at this writing the centralized structure of the Egyptian government maintains budgetary control in the Ministry of Finance, which, historically, has not been open to any delegation or decentralization—especially not at the school level. In terms of *community participation*, no significant laws or decrees were issued during the 1980s. Ministerial Decrees in 1993 and 1998 enabled local parent-teacher councils (PTCs) to raise funds and participate in aspects of school governance, including monitoring educational quality. During this period, parents and other community members became more involved in school matters, particularly in conjunction with donor projects. There was also a degree of community participation in national-level deliberations on education. A 1999 law establishing an NGO Department in the MOE, permitting NGO involvement in education and restricting "political" activity was ruled unconstitutional. Another law passed in 2002 allowed NGOs to receive funds from Egyptian and non-Egyptian sources. After reform projects activated boards of trustees, Ministerial Decrees in 2005 and 2006 sought to specify membership, responsibilities, and authority of the boards and PTCs. Parental and community involvement

increased during this period, particularly at the school level in relation to project-supported activities, but also at the *diara* (district), *muddiriya* (state), and national levels.

Political Dimensions

Egypt has experienced considerable continuity in leadership at both the national and Ministry level, with one Minister of Education holding office for 13 years and one president throughout that same period. In fact, there have only been three presidents in Egypt since 1954, all of the same party. While such continuity has resulted in a political stability that could, in theory, provide the conditions for longer-term commitments and engagement, in practice the tenure of a small group of leaders has limited the flow of new ideas and interventions that might have arisen in response to personnel changes in a less static political environment. Egypt's political continuity coupled with engagement of USAID personnel over a longer period provided an opportunity to develop strong working relationships.

Domestic politics were an important constraining factor for all decentralization and community participation reforms throughout the 1990s. During the period of study, central authorities referenced "national security" in explaining their ambivalence to implementation of such reforms. In this same period, the ministry reinforced its centralized power to limit local initiative, with a series of actions that purged educators and replaced curricular materials that were supportive of militants, and enacted the school uniform law. A significantly complicating factor at various times was the relationship between community participation and the influence of Islamist militant groups that could oppose the government. This complicating issue often undermined support for community participation.

The political dynamic between the Ministry and powerful Governors was positively affected by the reputation of pilot reforms in Alexandria, a highly visible and powerful governorate. The support for reform was enhanced by meetings of a governors' education reform network and an aggressive communications outreach by the Ministry, supported by the ERP project. In 2006, a number of supportive conditions fell into place. A key change was the cabinet shakeup that named a new Minister of Education, Dr. Yousri El-Gamal, who was previously a leading figure in the Alexandria reforms. At the same time, the former Governor of Alexandria was named as the Ministry of State for Local Development, and other reform-minded leaders assumed key government positions, creating a network of support for substantive reform. The knowledge and trust developed between the Minister of Education and the seven governors participating in the decentralization pilots encouraged him to delegate additional reform authority. At the same time, a former education official that

had been working as an advisor on the EQUIP2 project was brought back to the Ministry as the senior advisor. This confluence of events had two main beneficial effects: a number of people who shared both experience and vision for reform were brought together; and ERP, which had been working at both the national and governorate level on planning and vision, acquired greater access to and credibility with the senior levels of government. Over the next several years, the progress in education reform was, by any historical comparison, extraordinary.

The government's financial resource capacity and political will are generally viewed as positively related to implementing reform (i.e., greater resources lead to more extensive reform). In the case of Egypt, however, there was a negative relationship between resources and reform efforts. That is, the political will of central authorities to promote decentralization and community participation was, in part, influenced by resource limitations. Indeed, this appears to be the case in earlier years when the central authority pursued reform initiatives.[2] From the beginning of his presidency, Mubarak inherited financial challenges, which escalated by the early 1990s. The Egyptian government's financial resource capacity was enhanced, but with significant restrictions on public expenditure, when it negotiated a structural adjustment program to obtain a loan from the World Bank. These fiscal challenges, exacerbated by an expansion of the education system, encouraged the Mubarak government to experiment with laws and pilot projects aimed toward decentralizing responsibilities (if not authority) and increasing community participation during this period. Limitations in financial resources, however, seem to be a relatively constant feature of the Egyptian scene, and thus cannot help us to understand the significant increase in efforts toward decentralization and community participation that occurred in the early years of the 21st Century. To understand the more recent spike in government activity we need to consider another aspect of the political dimension, the role of civil society.

As in the case of financial resources, one might assume a positive relationship between the degree of mobilization of civil society and the political will of central authorities to promote reform. But in the case of Egypt, the relationship is a negative one. That is, central authorities hesitated, despite financial incentives, to foster decentralization and community participation in education because the most organized and active segment of civil society were groups identified as Islamist militants, with whom the government was engaged in conflict that was often violent. Recall that Mubarak became president following Sadat's assassination, and encountered an increasingly violent struggle with Islamist

2 For example, the 1883 provincial councils statute, the 1939 technical zones decree, and the 1960 Local Administrative Law (see Ibrahim and Hozayn, 2006)

militant groups (at least until 1997), but also faced a growing political challenge by individual members of the Muslim Brotherhood who served as candidates or voted for these candidates in elections for the People's Assembly. Thus, while some limited moves toward decentralization and community participation in the 1990s were framed in terms "democratization" and improving quality, central authorities referenced "national security" in explaining their ambivalence toward and hesitation in implementation of reforms to education, and their direct actions to *limit* local initiative, (i.e. purging of educators and curricular materials, enacting a school uniform law).

Interactions across Dimensions

Stakeholder participation and success in successful pilot interventions, and subsequent inclusion of key actors into positions of power, encouraged the development of consensus support for decentralization, as well as other reform activities. During the 1990s, successful pilot projects, resource support from multilateral agencies, and Egyptian MOE engagement in EFA activities nurtured experimentation with community participation and decentralization.

The Egyptian government and Islamist militants reaching a non-aggression pact after the attack on tourists in Luxor in 1997 seems to be one of the major explanations of the take-off in education reform efforts in governance and management reforms such as decentralization and community participation. Subsequent to the non-aggression pact, the ruling National Democratic Party and the Egyptian government promoted reforms in order to enhance their legitimacy within communities that had previously been less well served and less involved. At the same time, the struggle for political control in Egypt continued, with Muslim Brotherhood supporters achieving a sizeable minority in the People's Assembly in 2006.

During the period studied, increasing domestic discontent with the quality and outcomes of education increased pressure for reforms that would provide Egyptian families and youth with greater opportunities for a quality education. Importantly, providing "relevant" and "needed" educational and other social services to communities as part of a strategy to weaken the "threat" of Muslim Brotherhood (whose base was built through provision of such services) also resonated with multilateral and bilateral development agencies.

THE ROLE OF DONORS

Egypt has been a major recipient of foreign assistance in this period. This involves the role played by international (multilateral and bilateral) agencies as well as international NGOs, both in circulating ideas and building capacity (through funding, technical assistance, and training). Throughout this period, the international community was closely engaged and influential through a variety of mechanisms including: UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNDP assessments, conferences, and projects; World Bank reports and loan-funded projects; the European Union's funded projects; and USAID studies and funded projects.

Beyond the direct assistance, however, the broad currents of the international dialogue and consensus on education have influenced thinking in Egypt. The 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, and, perhaps more so, the Dakar Conference in 2000 served as catalysts of ideas and actions for educational reform, including undertaking reforms in governance and management to improve educational quality. The experience with specific donor assisted projects also contributed to the national reform efforts. UNICEF's Community Schools project (1992-2004) functioned as a lighthouse signaling how educators and community members in local communities could effectively take on responsibilities for establishing and managing schools. UNDP (in collaboration with the Institute for National Planning in Egypt) offered annual (2000-present) critiques of and encouragements for the Egyptian government's efforts to increase decentralization and community participation. The World Bank funded programs, Education Enhancement (1996-2004) and the Secondary Education Enhancement (1999-2004), were large-scale efforts to support the improvement of education.

As a bilateral aid organization, USAID played a prominent role in relation to the Egyptian government's reform agenda. During the 1980s USAID/Egypt mainly worked with the central government, seeking to reorganize and strengthen the MOE, while also providing funding for school construction, which involved some local actors. In the 1990s USAID/Egypt mainly funded projects focused on teacher training, again working primarily with central authorities though focused on building capacity of school-level personnel. During this period, the Minister rejected the only USAID/Egypt initiative that would have operated at the sub-national level in 1996. Within a few years, however, the same Minister agreed to projects that operated at the sub-national level: the New School Program (2000-2008), the Alexandria Pilot Project (2002-2004), and the Education Reform Program (2004-2009). Each project both reflected and contributed to

the growing political will and capacity of actors at various levels of the education system and in the community toward implementing decentralization and community participation.[3]

Particularly in the case of USAID projects, the assistance has financed the support of a number of international NGOs in providing studies/assessment, technical assistance, in country and overseas training, and management support. The active engagement of Egyptian and, in smaller numbers, international staff and consultants hired by these organizations has contributed to the continuous advancement of the education programs as they move between and among projects, and in and out of the Ministry of Education. This fluid exchange of expertise, experience, and perspective has contributed to a deepened base of expertise in the country that is able to develop effective working relationships between the government at all levels and the international community and projects.

This latter point is an important factor, in view of the fact that despite consistent international encouragement and pressure for decentralization over this period, it is only recently that significant progress has been made in instituting national reforms in this direction. Earlier "interventions" in this regard in Egypt may have been less effective because they were less concerted and sometimes contradictory, or because more time was required for the contributions to accumulate. However, it is also clear that national and local actors, and their relationships, collaborative and conflicting, are an important part of the story of reforming education governance and management in Egypt.

EXTERNAL FORCES AND GLOBAL TRENDS

In addition to the role played by international organizations within Egypt, we should also note the role they played in organizing events and disseminating associated declarations outside Egypt. Most notable in this regard are the 1990 Jomtien, Thailand, World Conference on Education for All and the 2000 Dakar, Senegal, World Education Forum. These events, in which high-level delegations from Egypt participated, served as a) platforms for Egypt to share its commitments and accomplishments, b) stimuli for government efforts to engage in further reform activities, and c) catalysts for international organizations to devote resources in support of the reform of educational governance and management in Egypt. In Egypt and other countries, national government officials have used select aspects of such international events to promote domestic support when the international agenda coincides with their own.

3 Notice how the global level developments connect to the national level factors of "political will" and "institutional capacity."

This study portrays Egyptian education reform process in relative isolation from other international and global developments, which was not the case. For instance, the evolving form of Egypt's relations with Israel has had a significant impact on the environment, and opportunities, for reforms. President Mubarak's administration began approximately two years after the Camp David peace accord between Israel and Egypt, which brought to a close hostilities initiated with the war in 1973. As with previous wars with Israel (e.g., 1948, 1954, and 1967), the 1973 war took a toll of human life but also negatively impacted Egypt's economic situation, reducing funds available to increase access to and quality of education. While the peace accord created significant new flows of international development agency support, it also added fuel to the conflict between the Egyptian government and Islamist militant groups. Similarly, Egypt's key political role in support of the U.S.-led war on Iraq in 1991 led to Egypt receiving debt forgiveness and financial aid from international organizations as well as to a heightening of conflict between the Egyptian government and Islamist militants groups.

CONCLUSION

The education challenges in Egypt are significant by any measure and are made substantially more difficult to overcome by the static political and bureaucratic structures.

The country's overall policy structure is complex and highly bureaucratic, and historically centralized. Interlocking policies and strong interest groups make it difficult to create the political space for substantive reforms. The conditions enabling the reform agenda to move forward included both the elimination of key constraints (especially the fear of Islamic militants) and the increasing pressure from civil society and the NDP for better quality education.

The lessons drawn from the Egypt experience are useful for understanding both the potential benefits of and the limits of donor assistance. In the 1990s, the successful interventions at the school level by UNICEF and USAID did not serve as a catalyst for broader decentralization reforms because those reforms ran counter to the prevailing political and leadership forces. However, the work provided a base of experience and information that was applied when the "space" for reform opened up. USAID's Alexandria project provided the opportunity for piloting aspects of system reform at the governorate level, and created some political confidence in the process. This pilot was possible because of the relationship of trust between the Minister and the Governor. Converting the pilot into a larger reform, and building momentum, required aligning

political will and experience in both the MOE and the governorates. The ERP project, combining school and district level work in the seven governorates with substantial technical support at the central and governorate leadership level, supported a process of learning and confidence building. The fortuitous move of the Alexandria reformers into key Ministry positions was a central factor in the accelerated reform process, as was the positioning of ERP. With established trust relationships between the Minister and USAID, and between ERP and the senior reform advisor, the substantial technical and financial resources of the project were applied to supporting the reforms.

ERP supported activities that addressed all of the elements of the reform framework. In the political dimension, key activities were the process and structure of the Governorate Education Reform Network, participatory strategic planning at the governorate and central levels, extensive communications and outreach to the governorates, engagement of political and social leaders, high-level technical assistance, conferences to generate political will, and provision of credible information and data to inform decision-makers. In the institutional dimension, complementary and supportive initiatives that drove the process included: extensive technical and financial support for strategic planning in all governorates and in the MOE; massive capacity building and policy implementation for the teacher cadre and certification; assessment of learning outcomes; EMIS quality and availability; policy formulation, and capacity building in schools in all of the governorates. In the technical dimension, on-going work at the school and district level provided both experience and evidence of impact, and refined the models and tools for instruction and school management.

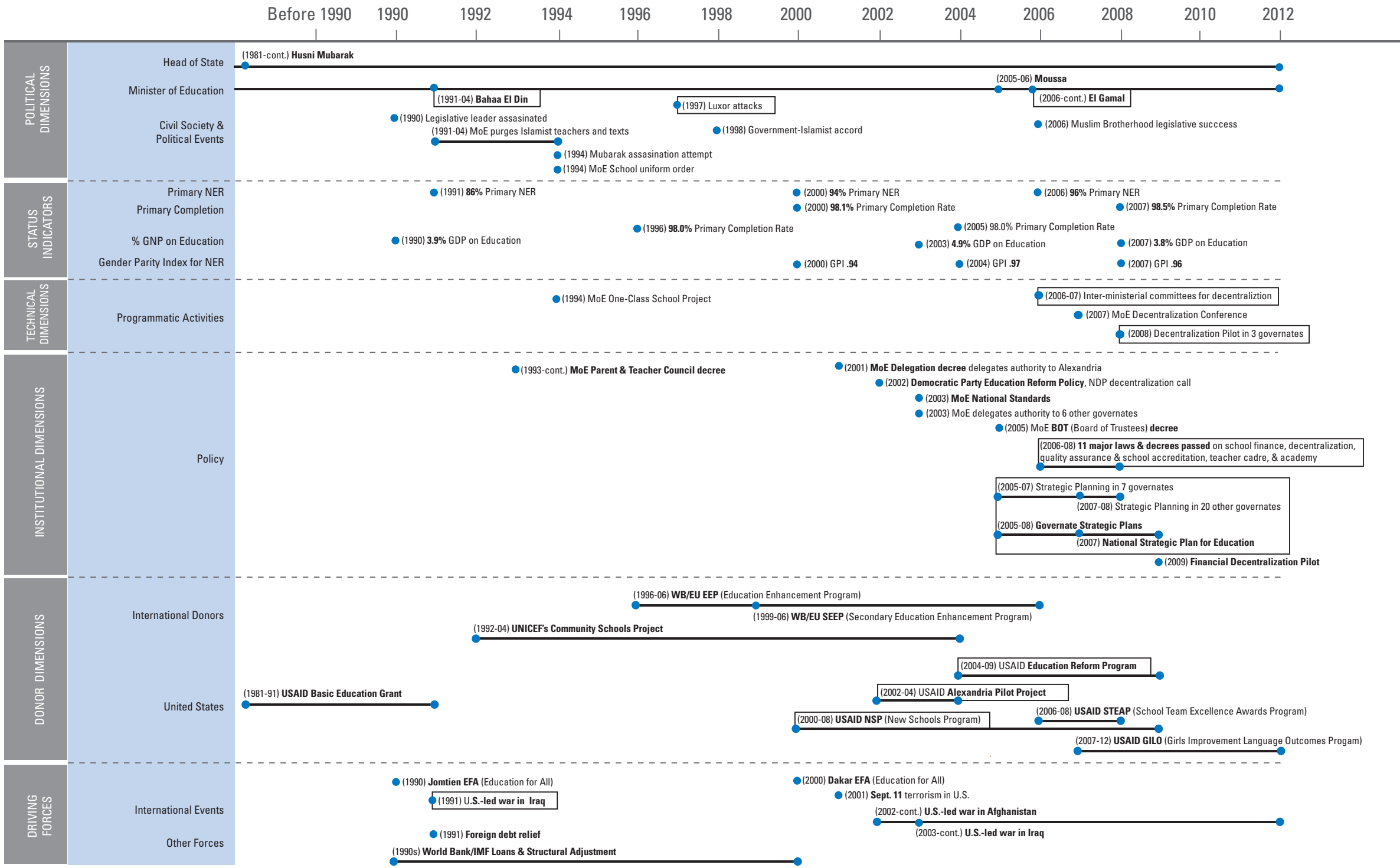
In spite of substantial progress achieved since 2001, the sustainability and potential impact of the reforms in Egypt are not assured. To a large extent, the reforms are still at an early stage. The significant achievements are at the level of policy formulation and political will for tackling some hard issues like teacher performance, financial decentralization, and community involvement. The progress on reform is vulnerable on a number of fronts.

- Much of the political will needed for momentum in reform is concentrated in a handful of leaders in the Ministries of Education and Finance (MOF) and governorates. It is important to continue to broaden and strengthen the support and commitment to key reforms within the Ministries, governorates, and civil society.

- The accomplishments to date are primarily at the level of policy and strategy formulation. The implementation of the strategy and new policies will require substantial on-going support in terms of both process and technical implementation.
- While the MOE and MOF have demonstrated significant political will and initiative in addressing hard issues such as teachers, administrative and financial decentralization, quality control, and school-based management, several critical issues remain unresolved. Two of these in particular—end of cycle exams and tutoring—are particularly problematic because they constitute serious distortions in the system and they represent a kind of "third rail" in Egyptian politics—nevertheless, these problems must be addressed.

EGYPT TIMELINE

Egypt Time Line



El Salvador: *Summary*

COUNTRY CONTEXT

In the early 1990s, El Salvador emerged from more than a decade of civil war. Civilian rule that was restored with by incoming ARENA government in 1989 had only limited authority in the ex-conflictive zones until the Peace Accords were formalized in 1992. Prior to the war, education was inequitable, favored the elites and strongly favored the capital city (Marques and Bannon, 2003). The new Salvadoran Ministry of Education (MINED) was responsible for resuscitating a public education system that had been neglected for years—with the result of low levels of access, enrollment, attainment, equity and literacy. Almost two decades later, MINED's long-term plan for education reform continues to shape Salvadoran education today.

REFORM GOALS

ARENA's goals for national reform were twofold. The first was to 'modernize' the government's structure by streamlining bureaucracy throughout the various ministries and increasing efficiency through decentralization and privatization of services (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003). The second goal was to transform and rebuild the education system as the center of ARENA's reconstruction agenda (Marques and Bannon, 2003). Throughout the period, the explicit goals for education were targeted increases in access, completion, and improved learning outcomes. These goals became more explicit in the 10-year plan, and even more specific in the Plan 2021.

Strategies

MINED was charged with improving their operations within the national framework of modernizing the government. In 1992, the Ministry of Education's situation was chaotic. It had grown haphazardly over the previous decade, and with the earthquake of 1986, MINED was not only organizationally and administratively disorganized, but also physically fragmented as offices were relocated throughout San Salvador. Their relationship with the teachers' union

was tense, and both sides often ignored the principle constituents: students. There was no precedent for establishing relationships with communities, parents, or even directly with schools.

Consequently, MINED modernized early in the reform process. This resulted in organizational changes within the Ministry of Education, as well as the creation of new mechanisms for delivering educational services. New budgeting procedures were introduced and communication and information systems were installed. MINED was reorganized into 14 departmental offices[44] and operations were decentralized in order to improve day-to-day support to schools through a single conduit—school supervisors—whose selection criteria and position descriptions were rewritten. In the midst of this restructuring, the government reinstated an educational supervisory system and revised the legal framework, resulting in the 1990 Law of General Education and subsequent laws for higher education and teacher credentialing.

The broader goal of rebuilding the education system required systematic effort and sustained attention. Before any technical interventions could gain traction, the Minister of Education recognized that ownership needed to lie with the general public. MINED employed a strategy of building broad public consensus to implement its reforms in such a fractured and untrusting environment. Their efforts included broad-based coalition building, extensive internal and external research, and the adoption of national long-term campaigns, all of which greatly influenced the positive and unifying role that education reform came to play in El Salvador.

In 1992, MINED created the first *Plan Nacional de Acción de Educación* to establish and strengthen linkages between the state and civil society to meet the basic education needs of the entire population (Bejar, 1997). The first phase introduced foundational programs such as EDUCO (discussed below), but focused mainly on consensus building, strategizing, and positioning MINED for broader reforms. This Plan was followed by MINED's first 10-year strategy (1995–2005), *Plan Decenal de Reforma Educativa en Marcha*. This plan soon led to a restructuring of the institutional framework governing education. New legislation was passed in 1995 and 1996 for basic education, teacher education, and higher education, all of which redefined the roles of key institutions and actors. Consequently, MINED's authority became more focused on central planning,

4 *Departamentos* are political administrative units equivalent to states or provinces. El Salvador comprises 14 administrative departments and MINED's reorganization mirrored these political designations.

financing, and ensuring adequate levels of equity, access, and quality. This tactic of consensus building and communicating the education agenda continues with MINED's most recent 16-year plan, *Plan 2021*, launched in 2005. Plan 2021 emphasizes improving the quality of learning and increasing El Salvador's global competitiveness through a better-educated population.

The two stated goals of the reform—decentralizing education provision and establishing broad participation—intersected to provide support for the ultimate objective: expanding access to primary education. Increasing access was especially relevant for populations in rural areas. Many of these communities had few, if any, state-sponsored education services in the 1980s due to the conflict. As a result, at least 500 community-run schools operated informally for years, mostly in rural zones. Following its decentralization rationale, MINED attempted to address the short-term emergency of educational coverage by sanctioning these community schools. MINED encouraged municipalities, NGOs, parents, and other private agents to be actively involved in educational affairs (World Bank, 2003). Independent community schools were therefore incorporated into the national system and supported by donor programs such as the USAID-funded Strengthening Achievement in Basic Education (SABE) Project and World Bank loans. MINED named this initiative EDUCO.

Perhaps the most influential reform project initiated during this period, Education with Community Participation, or EDUCO, began as a pilot in 1991. The project had three initial goals: expand access for pre- and primary schools in poor and rural areas; promote community participation; and establish a bridge, at least in terms of curriculum, between preschool and Grade 1 (Meza, Guzmán, and DeVarela, 2004). As mentioned above, this project formalized community schools, using similar governing principles but funded by the state. Through EDUCO, parents organized and registered Community Education Associations (ACEs) in order to manage government schools. By the end of the initial phase in 1993, some positive results were evident, notably that enrollment in rural areas had increased from 76 to 83 percent (World Bank, 2003). According to MINED, EDUCO became synonymous with educational coverage, exemplified decentralization through community participation, and helped to lay the foundation for the transformation of the national education system (Castro de Pérez, Meza, and Guzmán, 1999).

> ... EDUCO's role was not only on the issue of access, but politically it broke the "clientism" on the part of the government.
>
> —Darlyn Meza, Minister of Education

The major USAID program during this period was the Strengthening Achievement in Basic Education Project (SABE). This eight-year program (1990–1998) was funded at $33 million from USAID and an additional $26 million from the Government of El Salvador.

From MINED's point of view, SABE made two fundamental contributions early on. One was additional financial resources that allowed the Ministry of Education to invest in quality materials, which helped to sow the first seeds of change in the education system. Another was the first series of curricular reforms for preschool through Grade 6 (Castro de Pérez, Meza, and Guzmán, 1999). Additionally, SABE set up model schools in each district to exemplify well-resourced classrooms, well-trained teachers, and positive collaboration with parents. These model schools provided tangible, positive results that both communities and MINED could use as a common point of reference for future efforts.

> It was truly marvelous to have the SABE project at that time. It was the main support and the life of the Ministry revolved around the SABE project. Every Monday all of the education officials would meet to make plans with the little project... it was all there was, and it was well done.
>
> ...It was in this period that we could grab control and say "there are leaders here", we could show them who directs in the Ministry. Señores maestros—there IS authority!
>
> —Darlyn Meza, Minister of Education

SABE also made important, if subtle, contributions to MINED's working style. The weekly MINED Directors meeting established to coordinate project activities became an institutionalized management tool. One of the most critical factors in the continuing reforms over the coming decade was the credibility and public image of the MINED as a capable public institution. The technical and financial resources provided by SABE helped enable the Ministry of Education to provide services and meet its obligations, strengthening its credibility and negotiating position within the government and society.

From the perspective of SABE personnel, the project's most significant and lasting contributions included: introducing child-centered, activist learning concepts, materials, and practices; promoting decentralized education administration through school-based financial management (ACEs); assisting MINED with the creation of a coherent reform path; and supporting and strengthening MINED to ensure the successful implementation of their ambitious reform program, Reforma Educativa en Marcha (SABE Final Report, 1998). With SABE's technical assistance, the initial student achievement testing was completed, building both capacity and a demand for student learning data. This activity created the foundation for what would become a comprehensive student assessment system over the next 10 years.

Impact

Structurally, the education system was transformed during this period. MINED decentralized operations through the newly created Direcciones Departamentales, or regional offices, school governance was restructured based on the EDUCO model of ACEs to include School Steering Boards (CDEs) for all public schools and the equivalent for private schools, and funding was decentralized so that schools received transfers of funds directly from the central government through their ACEs or CDEs.

MINED proactively identified and addressed many challenges in the education sector with positive changes evident across all indicators. Enrollment has increased and dropout and repetition rates have decreased since the 1990s. Primary net enrollment rates are currently above 90 percent, secondary net enrollment has improved to 50 percent, and adult literacy is reported at 80 percent. Additionally, student assessment has been introduced for Grades 3, 6, 9, and for students leaving school, thus creating a systematic measure of achievement over time.

In all of these areas of reform—student assessment, school management, curriculum reform, decentralization, and teacher professional development—the programs MINED developed in the early 1990s proved to be essential building blocks for future reform. These programs provided concrete lessons for program revisions and changes to the very fabric of MINED's operational ethos. Having such long-running programs accompanied by a relatively consistent Ministry of Education staff allowed many opportunities for learning, adjustment, and improvement. While individual, branded programs sometimes were eliminated, the core principles of the reforms remained.

The greatest challenge, and the most consistent criticism of the reforms, has been that despite numerous technical interventions and considerable attention to multiple issues, classroom practices have changed relatively little (DiGropello, 2005). Many of the Plan 2021's reforms address what are now seen as central issues: teacher and school performance.

Impact on learning outcomes as measured in the national tests (PAES Grade 12 leaving exam and SINEA Grade 3, 6, and 9 assessments) and the regional comparison (SERCE) appears little changed over time. However, these learning outcome measures need to be interpreted cautiously. A comparison of the PAES scores from 1997 and 2008 showed virtually no change overall, and only a slight increase in language scores. However, the PAES test was revised and rescored twice in this period, making comparability over the long term unclear.

The trends since the last revision (2006–2008) show increases of 10–12 percent in each field of study.

El Salvador Education Indicators

Indicator	1991	1999/2000	2006
Number of Primary Students	-	940,000	1,035,000
GER Primary	-	112%	114%
NER Primary	75%	87%	94%
Completion Primary	40%	87%	86%
Survival to Grade 5	58%	65%	74%
GER Secondary	-	52%	65%
Gender Equity Ratio (Girls:Boys)—Primary	1.01	.96	.93
Repetition Rate—Primary	-	7.1%	7.5%
Education as % of Government Budget	-	17%	-
Education as % of GNP	-	2.4%	3.2%
$ Per Pupil	-	-	$478
$ Per pupil current spending	-	-	-

PAES Grade 12 Leaving Exam Results

Area	1997	1998	2002–2005	2006	2007	2008
National average	6.20	6.40	PAES exam and scoring protocol was revised	5.53	5.92	6.17
Social Sciences	6.60	6.60		5.87	6.40	6.42
Language	6.00	6.60		5.87	6.00	6.53
Mathematics	5.80	5.70		5.22	5.32	5.83
Environment and Health Sciences	6.10	6.60		5.53	5.99	6.03

CASE ANALYSIS: DIMENSIONS OF REFORM

Technical Dimensions

Numerous technical interventions have been applied at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels such as: curriculum development and revision; textbook distribution; student assessment; professional development system revision; parent and community participation; and health and technology programs. However, a unique feature of El Salvador's reform is the role that technical programs such as EDUCO played in creating momentum for other educational policies. Initially created out of necessity—and reinforced by the national emphasis on democratization, the global discourse on access and community participation, and the almost unflagging support from donors—these programs became foundational to Salvadoran education reform.

Between 1991 and 1998, EDUCO schools grew from 8,416 to 206,336 students, representing 25 percent of total public sector enrollment and 40 percent of rural enrollment (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003). Studies conducted at repeated intervals, many by the World Bank, maintained the focus on EDUCO, informed MINED, and helped to adjust policy and communications as necessary. EDUCO received the World Bank Presidential Award for Excellence in 1997 and was highlighted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as a successful experience of community education management. These well-publicized successes created space for dialogue at the national and local levels thereby amplifying the sense of common ownership among MINED, NGOs, international agencies, opposition political parties, the teachers' union, schools, and communities. The recognized technical success of the EDUCO program enhanced MINED's credibility and expanded the Minister of Education's political power to initiate new reforms.

Institutional Dimensions

At the beginning of the reform period, a World Bank sector assessment concluded that "the principle constraints to reforming the education system in El Salvador [were] not economic—[but rather] institutional and cultural." (Peña, 1995) Over time, the perceived success of technical interventions helped build confidence in the institutions—schools, ACEs, CDEs, and MINED—and created a virtuous cycle that provided greater latitude for other MINED projects. These initial steps were reinforced by corresponding changes in the legal framework governing education management and finance and further strengthened through capacity building programs for personnel at all levels of the system. Institutionally, the sector was generally able to keep pace with the technical and organizational demands.

The process of continuous improvement of the institutional and technical innovations is captured in some of the particular reform stories. While these stories can be presented as a linear, sequential development process, they are better understood as a series of intersecting and mutually reinforcing reforms. Each reform built and depended upon its immediate precursors, as well as upon the dynamics created in other reforms (e.g., information systems enabled policy dialogue, which encouraged demand for student achievement information, which in turn led to the development of school-based assessment systems).

The EDUCO reforms led to institutionalization of school management by ACEs in 1992, which was expanded to include all schools in 1998 through CDEs and *Consejos Educativos Católicos Escolar* (CECEE). The focus on school management and excellence was promoted in the *Escuela 10* program in the early 2000s to establish performance standards. While this program was not continued, the central idea of school strategies and work plans was expanded with the institutionalization of the PEI and PEA (school project plans) from 2001 on. By 2007, a new tool for school quality assessment was developed in the "*Ruta que Tomamos*" toolkit.

The focus on school management also led to reforms in the supervision system needed to support school leadership. In 2000, a system of "pedagogical advisors" was developed to complement the administrative supervisors. Rather than repurposing the existing supervisors, the MINED sought to create a new organizational culture of demand-driven technical and management support to schools. Subsequent reforms to the teacher training system undermined the original purpose, but the system structure remained.

The measurement of learning outcomes was promoted in the SABE project with the development of achievement tests, leading to the development in 1996 of the PAES end of cycle exams for Grade 12. After several years of working with and refining the PAES exam, both the demand for learning measures and the capacity to develop them led to the introduction in 2002 of the SINEA national learning evaluation system for system-wide testing in Grades 3, 6, and 9. By the mid-2000s, El Salvador was also participating in international comparative assessments such as TIMMS and SERCE.

The existence of a strong management information system has been a critical factor enabling informed reviews and tracking of progress. From the initial EMIS system development and strengthening in the 1990s with the assistance of the SABE project, the MINED has aggressively incorporated data and information into the communication and promotion strategies for the national plans. In

2005, USAID assistance further strengthened the information system with the development of the National Education Accounts, which provided comprehensive information about the source and use of public and private investments in education, and a new tool for integrating information from multiple databases (education, health, finance) for more robust analysis.

Political Dimensions

The general political discourse and the political will of successive ARENA presidents, MINED's leadership, and civil society engagement have all positively influenced the course of the reform and dramatically impacted MINED's policy agenda during this period. The incoming ARENA government in 1989 provided an unparalleled opportunity for change that was prioritized by the new president, and reiterated by each successive administration. In 1992, the Peace Accords pushed education to the forefront as the primary means for actualizing the national processes of democratization and consolidation. The five-year political cycle affected the rhythm of the educational reforms by creating alternating periods of experimentation and consolidation.

An unusual degree of continuity was established in MINED's leadership and vision. The first Minister of Education served for almost a decade (1989–1998) and was succeeded by others from her core team. In fact, most of MINED's national leadership over the 20-year period has shared a common vision, priorities, and commitment to the reform processes. New programs and processes were possible because of the credibility and institutional knowledge that MINED established over two decades of reform. This continuity has not been limited to Ministry of Education officials. Many national leaders from business, civil society, and political parties have participated continuously in the workshops and national dialogue since the early 1990s.

A striking feature of the Salvadoran reforms has been the continuing public engagement and the active outreach of the Ministry of Education to civil society. Private sector groups such as FEPADE (Business Foundation for Education Development), FUSADES (Salvadoran Foundation for Social and Economic Development), and many NGOs have been influential since the 1980s. Periodic national reviews of progress and strategies have been widely participatory, and many of the same influential citizens have participated from the beginning. MINED's outreach to the teacher unions are also notable in a region with contentious labor relations. The success of this approach can be measured by the near absence of teacher strikes since 1990, the last one occurring in 1999 when only two days of instruction were lost.

The most influential education reform support approaches in El Salvador have been the 1993 participatory sector assessment, the participatory development of two national strategies, periodic reviews (and workshops at Harvard and AED), and the Presidential Commission on Plan 2021, all of which are described in more detail below. From a political perspective, these activities supported a consensus building process and greatly contributed to MINED and its Ministers' credibility in the public eye. The international recognition of EDUCO and the signing of the Millennium Challenge Corporation pact further enhanced this trust. Throughout much of this period, the Minister of Education was regularly identified in public polls as the most trusted and capable cabinet officer. It would be difficult to overemphasize this point as MINED's power to negotiate reforms is greatly enhanced by this reputation and credibility.

Interactions across Dimensions

For El Salvador, the political dimensions of reform were arguably the most significant because they created the impetus for change. Maintaining political attention on broad educational goals and supporting this with tangible and documented achievements in both the technical and institutional realms provided the necessary traction for reform sustainability. Although the political contributions cannot be overstated, this case illustrates a complex combination of factors across all three dimensions that enabled mutually reinforcing activities at each stage of the reforms.

The establishment of a highly participatory education reform process is one example of a political initiative influencing technical and institutional dimensions. The consensus- building process brought civil society, business leaders, and political opponents together around diverse educational priorities. Building that broad-based coalition empowered MINED to make dramatic institutional and policy changes while giving them greater latitude to apply technical interventions throughout the sector.

The institutionalization of information availability and use has held political and technical sway, signaling an increasingly sophisticated and mature MINED that both creates and draws on evidence and information use. As early as the SABE project, USAID supported the establishment of information systems and early testing to improve data use in education decision-making. As more complex information systems and assessment tools have been introduced, the data generated has informed policy and technical interventions. The development of a data culture was clearly evident in 2008, when the results of a study (the *National Education Accounts*) that showed the high private cost of secondary education led to the elimination of public fees.

EDUCO's success exemplifies a technical program affecting the institutional and political environments. As has been mentioned, the goal of EDUCO was to respond to the need for education in underserved communities. The technical solution was decentralized governance and school finance for community schools. Repercussions of this technical intervention included the creation of new institutional entities (ACEs and CDEs), new institutional arrangements (between schools and teachers, teachers and MINED, and MINED and communities), and new legislation formalizing the entities interactions (Bejar, 1997). Widespread recognition of EDUCO's impact, through evaluations and publicity, strengthened the public perception and acceptance of community and parent involvement in school management. Politically, it increased MINED's visibility and credibility and altered the dynamics of interaction within MINED and the education sector to significantly reduce political patronage or *clientismo*.

A long-term review of the reforms demonstrates the iterative processes that characterize Salvadoran education. ACEs, for instance, were first instituted in 1992 to promote local participation and school-based management in EDUCO schools. Similar structures, CDEs and CECEs, were institutionalized by 1998 for all traditional public and religious schools. However, it became apparent that the quality of the school management committees varied widely (Cuéllar-Marchelli, 2003). By 2001, MINED introduced school management tools, known as PEI and PEA (*Proyecto Educativo Institucional* and *Proyecto Eduactivo Anual*) that were supposed to improve the effectiveness of ACEs and CDEs. These are mission, vision, and planning tools that each school is legally required to have: the PEI is the school's five-year plan, and the PEA is an annual list of activities that the school intends to implement, such as fundraising, special events, learning activities, or lesson plans. More recently, MINED is applying a School Report Card methodology to further improve the quality and utility of the PEIs and PEAs.

The Role of Donors

MINED was heavily dependent on the financial and technical resources provided by external donors, particularly in the beginning of the reform period. Donor assistance has been a catalyst in enabling the continuing reforms and strengthening the education sector. For example, from 1991 to 2005 the IDB, World Bank, and USAID contributed over $552 million to the Salvadoran education sector. Other donors included the United Nations (UNESCO), the European Union, and the Organization of Iberian-American States (OEI). Donations and technical assistance were also received from the governments of Japan, Mexico, Spain, Israel, France, and Germany (Guzmán, 2002).

A transformative event that is still referenced by virtually all stakeholders is the participatory sector assessment supported by USAID in 1993. This assessment was not an 'expert' study conducted by international specialists, but rather a collaborative effort through which experts informed MINED, private sector, and society deliberations. The study, led by a team from Harvard and other international and local consultants, enabled a reflective process of analyzing and prioritizing the problems that led to MINED's first 10-year Plan. Inclusion of a broad cross section of society into the process reinforced the philosophy of the Minister of Education and helped create a broad national consensus on education priorities that was maintained for the next 15 years. A similar process was conducted at the end of the 10-year Plan in preparation for Plan 2021. In a highly partisan and divided country, the continuing participatory process pursued by MINED helped to establish education as the only space in which there was consensus rather than conflict.

USAID enabled the consensual development process not only through collaboration with MINED, but also through direct support to civil society actors. In the mid-1980s, USAID had helped to establish FEPADE, FUSADES, and other civil society actors who played important think tank, advocacy, and implementation roles throughout this period.

Another distinguishing feature of the USAID programs in particular has been the strong sense of partnership with the Ministry of Education. While maintaining a focus on results, the programs have tended to be flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the country. Moreover, they have reflected sensitivity not only to the technical, but also the political role education plays in El Salvador. A recent example was the process by which USAID and the EQUIP2 project accompanied the national consultation of the Presidential Commission for Plan 2021 in 2008. In this case, USAID creatively responded to opportunities that surfaced in the year prior to national elections to build conditions for sustainability.

In January 2008, the Presidential Commission requested USAID assistance to write its final report and complete its three-year mandate to monitor and evaluate the implementation of Plan 2021. In consultation with USAID and the EQUIP2 team, the Commission agreed that a full evaluation was not feasible and that a facilitated reflection on the sustainability of the Plan would be useful. As a result of the weeklong broad based reflective assessment led by EQUIP2 consultants, the Commission's mandate was extended to develop sustainability and financing plans for Plan 2021 that would be supported by both political parties in the 2009 elections. Additional expert-facilitated dialogues were conducted on financing options and school quality, and the process culminated in a high-level policy

workshop with representatives of both parties and civil society leaders that closed with a general working agreement about the continuity of the overall education policy. In this manner, USAID facilitated an important and influential country-led process, supporting it with funds and technical assistance and demonstrating the innovativeness and appropriateness of their partnership with MINED.

EXTERNAL FORCES AND GLOBAL TRENDS

A number of forces—national, regional, and global—influenced the course of El Salvador's educational reforms. Nationally, there were movements outside the public and education sectors throughout the 1980s to focus more attention on education. These national dialogues were strongly influenced by other regional examples, such as Chile's KAST program, which provided some of the conceptual foundations for EDUCO (Marques and Bannon, 2003). More importantly, this model of open dialogue and transparent decision-making influenced how MINED approached its strategic planning, designed its overall reform, and communicated policies to its stakeholders.

Regionally, during the mid- to late-1980s there was impetus from neighboring Latin American governments to resolve the civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. The peace plans for Central America in 1987 and 1989 spurred governments to intensify negotiations and establish reconciliation processes with UN support. With regard to education, ambitions educational reform agendas were tested and implemented in Latin America, such as those in Chile and Argentina. These provided regional examples and expertise that enriched the dialogues and decisions for education in El Salvador.

> The fact that education reform advanced more swiftly in El Salvador was perhaps because that country managed to forge a national consensus on the reforms' importance and priority, firmly supported by three successive ARENA party governments (the same Ministry of Education authorities having served throughout that period), and external donors who provided continued technical and financial support.
>
> —From *Central America: Education Reform in a Post-Conflict Setting, Opportunities and Challenges by* J. Marques and I. Bannon

Global trends further inspired and reinforced El Salvador's policies. The international community was shaping educational priorities with world-wide conferences such as Education for All in 1990, highlighting the need for improved education *quality*, *efficiency*, and *equity*, rhetoric that is similarly reflected in Salvadoran policy (Álvarez and Ruiz-Casares, 1997). El Salvador also participated in the International Convention for Children's Rights in 1990 and elements of this discourse are clearly evident in MINED's policies and priorities following the Peace Accords (Castro de Pérez, Meza, and Guzmán, 1999).

Institutionally and organizationally, the push for decentralization and privatization was echoed by global processes of market forces and donor recommendations for streamlining bureaucracies and increasing participation and decision-making for local entities. All the major donors in El Salvador supported aspects of MINED's decentralization efforts and the policy was largely adapted from priorities put forward by the World Bank, IDB, and USAID. The management style MINED adopted and the administrative restructuring that it spearheaded reflected the new government's commitment to decentralization and was reinforced by global trends.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, El Salvador's education sector has been characterized by consistent policies and steady improvement of institutional capacity and system outcomes. Enrollment and completion in the primary and secondary levels have increased substantially. In EDUCO and other initiatives, El Salvador has developed internationally recognized innovations in school governance. MINED's institutional capacity is among the best in the region, and the country has maintained a high degree of commitment and consensus on education development.

Key factors enabling sustainable and consistent progress over such a lengthy period include:

- **Strong and consistent Ministry of Education leadership enabled a country-led development effort.** El Salvador demonstrated perhaps the most significant and sustained level of national ownership and leadership in the region. The country was living the Paris Declaration before the declaration itself, and because of national leadership rather than donor concessions. At times, this has created resentment from the donors.

- **The participatory development of a strategy, sector assessment, and two successive long-term plans provided a framework for working with donors and gaining societal consensus.** The extent to which the donor community supported and recognized the plans' importance was important. The consensus-based planning process was enabled by the continuity of MINED's philosophy.

- **The stability of MINED's mid-level leadership and technical expertise contributed to both continuity and deepening institutional capacity.** This was evident in the continuous evolution and improvement of core initiatives such as EDUCO, student testing, curriculum, and information management.

- **The continuing commitment to the use of information, evaluation, and communications.** Both the 10-Year Plan and Plan 2021 were strongly branded with coherent communications strategies.

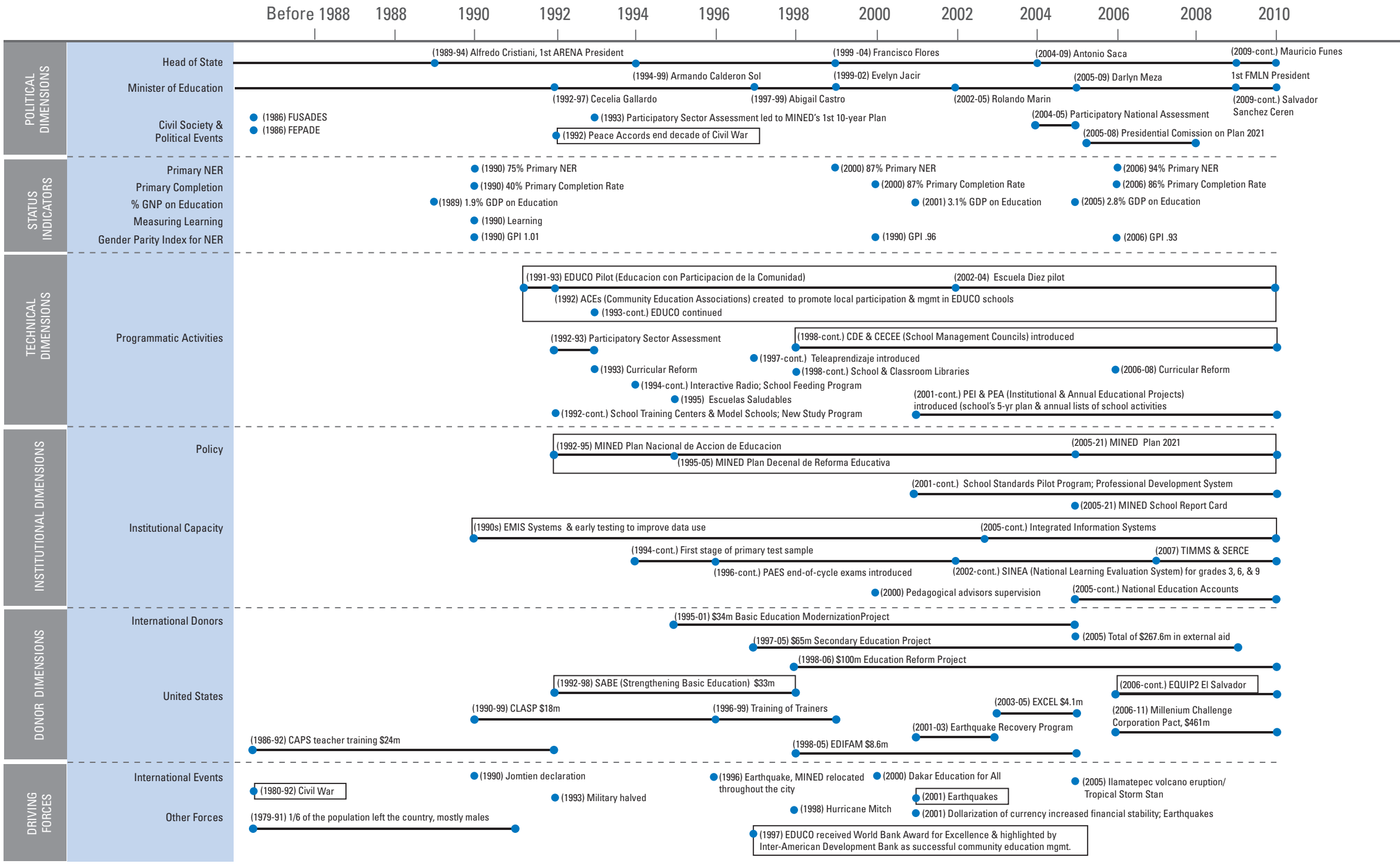
- **The effective technical and financial partnerships with donors such as USAID enabled many of the key processes and structures of the period.** To an unusual degree, the USAID programs in El Salvador "accompanied" the Ministry of Education's reforms rather than dictating them. The benefits of the collaboration were exceptionally close relations and trust between USAID, implementing partners, and MINED officials. The technical support contributed to successful activities, which in turn enhanced the credibility of each Minister of Education. Through projects with institutional contractors and local NGOs, USAID played a facilitative role between MINED and civil society. By balancing its roles as an inside and outside actor, USAID was able to introduce new ideas and perspectives from world experts, support and encourage local leadership, enable productive interaction with civil society, and finance innovations and activities that would have otherwise been difficult to achieve.

> Whether relatively swift or gradual, when viewing the cumulative experience of the past decades, significant change has occurred. With increasing maturity and steady progress, the current education system includes many elements that will help it to move towards the next stage of reform. In retrospect, the reform process has been more iterative than linear. It is difficult to identify one actor, project, policy, or event that made the biggest difference—although there have been a number of notable individuals and programs throughout the reform. Rather, it is the interrelation of factors that created the momentum to make such dramatic change possible. The persistent challenge remains "one of ensuring effective implementation of what are often difficult institutional and behavioral changes"
>
> —From *Secondary Education in El Salvador: Education Reform in* Progress by C. Winter

The March 2009 national elections resulted in the first FMLN president and administration in history, breaking ARENA's 20-year hold on political leadership. This assumption of power by a left-wing party will introduce new and different philosophies, priorities, and personalities. The continuity of MINED leadership and technical expertise will be broken. In this transition, ARENA will need to learn how to function as a minority partner, and FMLN will learn how to manage from the leadership position. Over the coming years, the success of previous strategies of consensus building will be tested, including the work of the Presidential Commission in 2008. The results will only become clear over a period of years, as investments in civil participation, capacity, and knowledge mature throughout the system.

EL SALVADOR TIMELINE

El Salvador Time Line



Namibia: *Summary*

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Namibia's colonial history informs the dominant influences in the country's political, economic, and social life. The former German colony of South-West Africa was occupied during World War I by South Africa, which then annexed the territory after World War II. The South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) initiated a guerrilla war of independence in 1966, which culminated with independence in 1990. SWAPO has governed the country since that time, with the first 14 years under the SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma.

Namibia enjoys one of the highest levels of per capita income in Africa, but this statistic is misleading. With a Gini index of 74, Namibia also has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world. Much of the majority black population is poor, engaged in subsistence agriculture, and living in the Northern regions. In addition to the economic challenges, HIV/AIDs is a significant factor in Namibia, with a prevalence rate of over 21 percent of the adult population.

REFORM GOALS

From the outset of the education reform development with Independence in 1990, the Namibian government's goals were all related to nation building and democratization of the society. The policies were all formed and driven by the ideological shift from a system of racial apartheid to one based on the principles of inclusive democracy. The major education policies came directly from the principles of the new Constitution and the education practices in the pre-Independence schools developed and managed in the pre-Independence SWAPO camp schools, supported by internationally recognized concepts of teaching and learning. The education reform movement, from 1990 through to the present has been consistently guided by the overarching principles of equity, access, and quality.

Strategies

Especially in the early years, the government's strategy was to focus on the "formerly disadvantaged" regions in the north of the country where the majority black population, with nearly 70 percent of the school age children, are located. International donor funded projects were directed to those regions, designed to support the implementation of the major education policy initiatives. As project initiatives were refined and demonstrated effective support for reform efforts (by a variety of measures), the leadership within the Ministry of Education took steps to expand reform implementation to the remaining education regions not served by international donor project funding.

As the government's goal of full participation in terms of enrollment and greater community and parent participation through mandated school boards became largely met, with cooperative support from the donor community, the education leadership moved toward reforms designed to improve the quality of the education system. With greater public participation in decisions related to schooling increased, more emphasis on improved quality, defined by learner performance, became a larger feature of the reform effort. Simultaneously, the Government and the Ministry of Education responded to pressure from donors, particularly USAID and the World Bank, to direct policy and practice toward empirical measures of effective practice and increased overall efficiency of the system.

The central drivers of *learner-centered education* (LCE) and *continuous assessment* (CA) came out of the pre-nation initiatives, and were largely driven by a theory of education and development. These two issues were the practical application of the conceptual underpinning of the reforms, and continued throughout the study period, along with the idea of community participation and decentralized support.

The school level strategies and tools were initiated and developed through various influences. The idea of *school improvement plans* (SIP) in 2000 came with the overall philosophy of the reforms, and was given substance through the assistance from the USAID BESII project. Working in four, and later six, northern regions, the assistance project strengthened regional leadership, circuit support teams, and the protocols for SIP development. The *school self assessment* tool, which became fully integrated into the SIP process as an extension of the ideology of community participation, was initiated after the Principal Secretary and other officials saw a similar approach on an official visit to the Seychelles. From the initial project activities, the SIP and SSA were adopted as national policy and incorporated into a School Self Evaluation system in 2005, and moved from project support to a Ministry function.

The *assessment of learner achievement* was a gradual process, initiating with the Grade 7 leaving exam, participation in the SACMEC regional examinations, and gradually integrating the Learner Performance Assessment Instrument (LPAI) test at the primary level for instructional improvement. The LPAI pilot was sufficiently successful that a previous ban on testing in the lower grades was abandoned, and additional assessment tools are planned for Grades 5 and 8.

Impact

In terms of equity and access, significant progress has been made in achieving full participation in the first 10 years of schooling. Survival to Grade 5 has increased substantially, although the impact of HIV/AIDs has limited the improvement in primary enrollment. The broad reform policy initiatives discussed in this paper, instructional practice (LCE and CA), decentralization and parent involvement (school self assessment) have moved over the study period from project activities to national directives to elements of daily practice in schools. The changes have been most dramatic and more thoroughly documented in the "previously disadvantaged" areas where the emphasis on reform and improvement was made, but can also been seen to be spreading to the remaining regions through MOE efforts.

Namibia Education Indicators

Indicator	1991	1999/2000	2006
Number of primary students	-	383,000	403,000
GER Primary	-	104%	107%
NER Primary	86%	73%	76%
Completion Primary	-	-	63%
Survival to Grade 5	62%	92%	87%
GER Secondary	-	55%	57%
Teacher Pupil Ratio	-	32:1	31:1
Gross Intake Rate—Primary	-	97%	104%
Gender Equity Ratio (Girls:Boys)—Primary	1.03	1.01	1.00
Repetition Rate—Primary	-	12.3%	16.4%
Education as % of Government budget	-	-	-
Education as % of GNP	-	7.9%	6.8%
$ Per pupil	-	$1,416	$994
Trained Teaches as % of Total	-	27%	92%

In terms of quality, the impact on student achievement in the northern regions is also notable. The charts below show the changes in Grade 10 student grades in each region over the period from 2001 to 2007. The scores are a composite of the five best subjects and English. From a maximum score of 42, the statistics capture the percentage of the students scoring between 23 and 42—or above 55 percent. The regions are grouped as follows: a) the six northern regions, which are traditionally disadvantaged areas that received considerable international assistance and particularly the BES 1, 2, and 3 projects; b) four colored/ white regions and the capital, which traditionally have had the best schools and teachers; and c) three other regions that were not the focus of particular donor intervention. The national averages reflected slight improvements in student learning over this period, but the differences between the regions were dramatic. The Northern regions have experienced consistent improvement, moving from being well below the national average to reaching the national average. By contrast, the colored/white areas have dramatically decreased in student learning, while the other areas have held more or less steady.

The patterns between specific regions are equally striking. On a national scale, the improvement was minimal—with slightly more than one percentage point improvement. All of the Northern regions showed improvement over this period, with the best showing being in Oshikoto, which went from 43 percent to 57 percent of students with high scores (scoring 55 percent on the grading index). Overall, Kuhene showed the most significant increase in student performance in this period. In the traditionally white and mixed areas, however, performance suffered. This study did not investigate the possible reasons for this decrease.

CASE ANALYSIS: DIMENSIONS OF REFORM

Technical Dimensions

The government's reform efforts, largely politically driven but based on solid education research, proved a powerful combination in terms of improving key features of education delivery. In terms of overall change in the system and its results, student assessment and community involvement as realized through school self-assessment and school improvement planning have been the most fully implemented education reforms.

The central technical initiatives involved *pedagogical approaches* such as learner centered education and continuous assessment, *school management and governance approaches* including school self-assessment and school improvement planning, and *enhanced decentralized support and professional development* at the circuit and regional level. These three approaches were integrated and mutually

supportive. The Circuit Support Teams (CST) provided direct technical assistance to schools and communities in conducting the school self assessment and developing school improvement plans, and were also responsible for teacher and principal professional development at the circuit and school level.

Institutional Dimensions

The institutional framework evolved in stages as the reforms took place and experience was gained. In the first years after independence, the challenge was to create a single Ministry out of the 13 separate ministries—one for each homeland. Moreover, the Ministry had to integrate the existing school system—in which there were principals, teachers, and parents who had never been in the exile camps—with an alternative system in exile that had developed a philosophy and approach with the assistance of donors. These two streams were coming from fundamentally different experience.

The major policies in the early years focused on teacher development, with the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD), and a new curriculum taken directly from the principles that the Swedish advisors introduced in the SWAPO exile camps. This was in effect an effort to scale up a system that had been developed with a small, homogeneous group and sufficient resources and use it in an environment with diverse cultures and languages, with a different history of teacher training, and with limited resources. However, a key feature of the system was critical inquiry and reflective practice, which enabled learning while encouraging the emancipation of teachers and learners.

A central feature of the institutional development, particularly in the period after 1995 when the Ministry of Education was consolidated, was the ongoing and supportive professional development of the cadre of Ministry officials most directly involved with schools: Inspectors of Education, Advisory and Resource Teachers, principals and teachers. Two aspects of this professional development program are particularly noteworthy. One is that the system was structured to put into practice the philosophy of critical inquiry and reflective practice—a feature that deepened both understanding and ownership of the reforms. The regional programs were designed and implemented with regular regional and inter-regional workshops to review progress, refine instruments and approaches, and conduct technical training. Over time, this embedded a deep sense, and reality, of ownership of the strategies and reforms among the operational staff (circuit support teams), school principals and teachers, and in the regional education leadership.

The second aspect is that the professional development program was strongly supported over a period of more than 10 years by a major donor partner, USAID. This reliable, collaborative donor-government relationship significantly contributed to the development of widespread capacity in the operational levels of the Ministry. The USAID financing and technical assistance enabled the relatively intensive regional workshops that were an essential part of developing deep ownership. The USAID assistance also financed and trained the position of Resource Teachers, an innovation that enabled the circuit teams to provide the necessary level of support to schools. Ultimately, these positions were institutionalized in the regions.

The importance and impact of the deep learning and capacity development achieved in the Northern regions during the BES II period was demonstrated after the SIP/SSA policies were adopted as national policy. The successful scaling up of the SIP/SSA activities in the North, and the concomitant capacity building of the Circuit Support Teams, was achieved with Project support and regular regional and intra-regional workshops that developed ownership of the reforms through constant refinement and capacity building. This created not only the skills needed, but also a culture and deep understanding of the principles and practice of school support. When the responsibility for nationwide implementation was assigned to a Ministry office and Project support ended, much of the central characteristics of the SIP program in the North were lost as it expanded to new areas. The character of the visits from Resource and Advisory teachers began to revert to traditional supervision instead of adopting the capacity building function developed in the North. The School Self Evaluation process began to emphasize control and reporting rather than empowerment. However, Education Officers, Circuit directors, and resource teachers in the North have begun to resist this revision of the program, and are promoting national workshops to reestablish the culture of professional reflection and capacity building that had been so successful in the North. In some ways, this is a classic "implementation dip" as the program moved from the control of a small, well trained group to general usage. Ultimately, the successful scaling up of the original program will depend on the capacity developed in the Northern teams.

Political Dimensions

The somewhat flexible nature of a relatively new system, despite the country's recent history of apartheid, became an enabling feature for education reform in Namibia. As noted above, the weak institutional capacity of the education system in the young democracy was unequal to the demands of quickly developing and implementing reform policies and absorbing the donor support. Nonetheless, the capacity constraints were more than offset by political will and leadership at the

highest levels of government, and by growing support for education reform in civil society. Namibia's government and Ministry of Education leaders, as well as key regional level educational leaders were all motivated by the democratic ideology.

However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that there were no conflicts or differences of opinion. In fact, the policy of "continuity with change" that retained Afrikaner civil servants in senior posts while expanding Black leadership and technical jobs was complex and difficult. The involvement of multiple institutions such as NEED, the different dependencies of the MOE, and the regional education officers in implementing education reform brought many different perspectives and approaches into conflict.

The influence of the ideology and strong national leadership from a succession of capable Ministers of Education was given tangible support and deepened by the participatory partnership of USAID program management. In fact, USAID's early decision to establish a Steering Committee for project governance was one of the most important and strategic actions in this period. The Steering Committee was headed by a senior Ministry official and composed of the heads of each of the departments involved, as well as the director of NIED and the regional education officers, as well as USAID.

Beyond its original purpose of providing direction for the project, the Steering Committee provided a structure and a process for ownership, empowerment, leadership development, and continuity. As an established management structure, the Steering Committee created a forum for continuity through personnel changes, because changes in Ministry offices, regional directors, NIED, and USAID did not all happen at the same time. It also provided a forum for all stakeholders to work out their differences. Finally, the participation of the regional education officers gave them a greater voice in key decisions, and an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership and capacity, which in turn enhanced their credibility with the Ministry leadership.

Interactions across Dimensions

Using the lens of the political, institutional, and technical dimensions of the reform process, the story of education reform in Namibia can provide insight into how the process plays out over time. The three examples of specific reform efforts: school self evaluation/school improvement planning, site based teacher development, and the measurement of learner performance, all provide vivid and powerful pictures of the non-linear, non-formulaic nature of the processes at work. Each of these education programs has in common some key elements from which lessons could be drawn:

- The complex and holistic nature of a reform effort such as school self evaluation feeds into and supports improvements in teacher development and learner performance. As parents, community members, teachers and principals publicly define and share a vision for improvement, things change.
- Identifiable, measurable, and empirical evidence of change, made available to local stakeholders, serves as impetus and rationale for local level school improvements. The use of the SIP and SSE for feedback to the schools, communities, and Circuit Support Teams was an important demonstration of how information supports change.
- Technical capacity building over time, with systematic feedback mechanisms, contributes to transition from reform policies to program activities inside the education system. The capacity building in Namibia was organic, using the regional and intra-regional workshops for professional reflection. This is the key to institutionalization and sustainability of improvements.
- Donor innovation and intervention can both spur progress toward reform implementation and/or stall the process, depending upon the ways in which the political and institutional dimensions interface with donor objectives.

THE ROLE OF DONORS

Although the new government had little in the way of funding for the reform effort,[1] "international donor support came streaming in, which reinforced the 'rightness' of the reforms, along with the UN Jomtien declaration in 1995 of education for all." Donor support during the first five to six years was seen as validation of the reforming ideology. Major sources of donor support were the Swedish SIDA and USAID, both of which worked with the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) on curriculum development and teacher training.

Some of the same advisors from SIDA had worked in the SWAPO camps and with many of the same Namibian education officers who took jobs in the new Ministry at Independence. There was an almost seamless transition from "emergency" to national level policy development and program design on the part of that donor agency.[2]

1 However, it should be noted that the Government of Namibia has always allocated the highest proportion of its annual budget to the education sector.
2 For a thorough analysis, see Dahlstrom, L (1995). Teacher Education for Independent Namibia: from the liberation struggle to a national agenda. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. 21 (3), 273-288

Donors included UNICEF, GTZ, USAID, SIDA, DIFD and other education development NGOs with project support in areas related to curriculum development, new textbooks and teaching materials, improving the use of English, school clustering for more effective school management, curriculum and instruction at the colleges of education, developing and implementing a formal in-service teacher professional development for under-qualified teachers, leadership training and related issues to support reform policy implementation. USAID support to Namibia was initially in the form of non-project assistance directly to the government, but the project was redesigned as a technical assistance project at the request of the GON. This initiated a continuous flow of assistance through BES I, BES II, and BES III projects, as well as some other initiatives. The BES II project provided direct support to the SIP and SSA initiatives in the Northern regions, involving development and refinement of instruments and approaches. Regional training and review workshops focused on capacity building in circuit support teams and regional administration.

According to the MCA Namibia Program document, the total overseas development contribution to Namibia in 1992 was US$130 million, increasing to $146 million in 2003. Additionally "The United States, committed to providing USD73.1 million in support for the period 2005-2010, is now Namibia's largest bilateral development partner. The largest proportion of those funds is allocated for the education and health sectors.[3]

Although the government made efforts, both within the Ministry of Education and through the National Planning Commission, little genuine collaboration across donors occurred in the education sector. Division of various components within the sector were recognized as being the major area of focus for particular agencies, such as GTZ taking responsibility for program related to school management while USAID had teacher development as one of its primary areas. However, even those divisions overlapped somewhat and were based on a more or less informal arrangement.

EXTERNAL FORCES AND GLOBAL TRENDS

Namibia's participation in the Jomtien Education for All Conference coincided with and greatly reinforced the reform effort by giving international recognition to the ideological forces underlying the country's education policy development. Throughout the period of time under review here, Namibia's educational leadership was active in international education research; Namibia's reform

3 MCA Namibia Program: Background and Development Strategy. Ministry of Finance, Government of Namibia. 2006.

efforts have been studied closely, and individuals and institutions within the larger system have embraced international donor organization thinking. Many of the key reforms were directly based on concepts and recommendations from education research in the international community.

The political and social stability of the southern Africa region in general and Namibia in particular ensured donors the opportunity to support education reform efforts with a relatively "risk free" return on their contributions to the process. The recent analysis by the World Bank and the Millennium Challenge Account has moved the government and the Ministry toward a more economically driven model of measuring education input-output efficiency, which is contributing to a shift in thinking about how to define the quality of education delivery.

CONCLUSION

The development and strengthening of the education system in Namibia is a story of deep ownership at all levels—national, regional/circuit, and school/community. It is also a story of slow, deliberate and persistent capacity building and scaling up of innovations. Interconnected processes of ownership and capacity development at the national, regional, and school levels combined to successfully introduce and scale up a complex set of school reforms. The keys to the sustainability and scaling up of the SIP/SSA program include:

- Program implementation at the region and circuit level emphasized reflective practice and joint responsibility for developing the approach and implementing the program. The frequent regional workshops enabled professionals from the Northern regions to exchange experiences, solve problems, and revise the procedures as needed to make them effective. This frequent opportunity for professional reflection created deep learning about the process, genuine ownership, and capacity because they were empowered to implement the program.

- The Northern regions benefited from strong, capable leadership in several of the regions and the circuit teams. The leadership capacity was facilitated and supported by the regional management of reforms, the regional workshops, and the Steering Committee.

- The Steering Committee process and structure had two important impacts. First, it created a forum for negotiation among the different stakeholders in the Ministry, the regional education officers, and USAID. The steering committee was a governance structure with some decision-making authority,

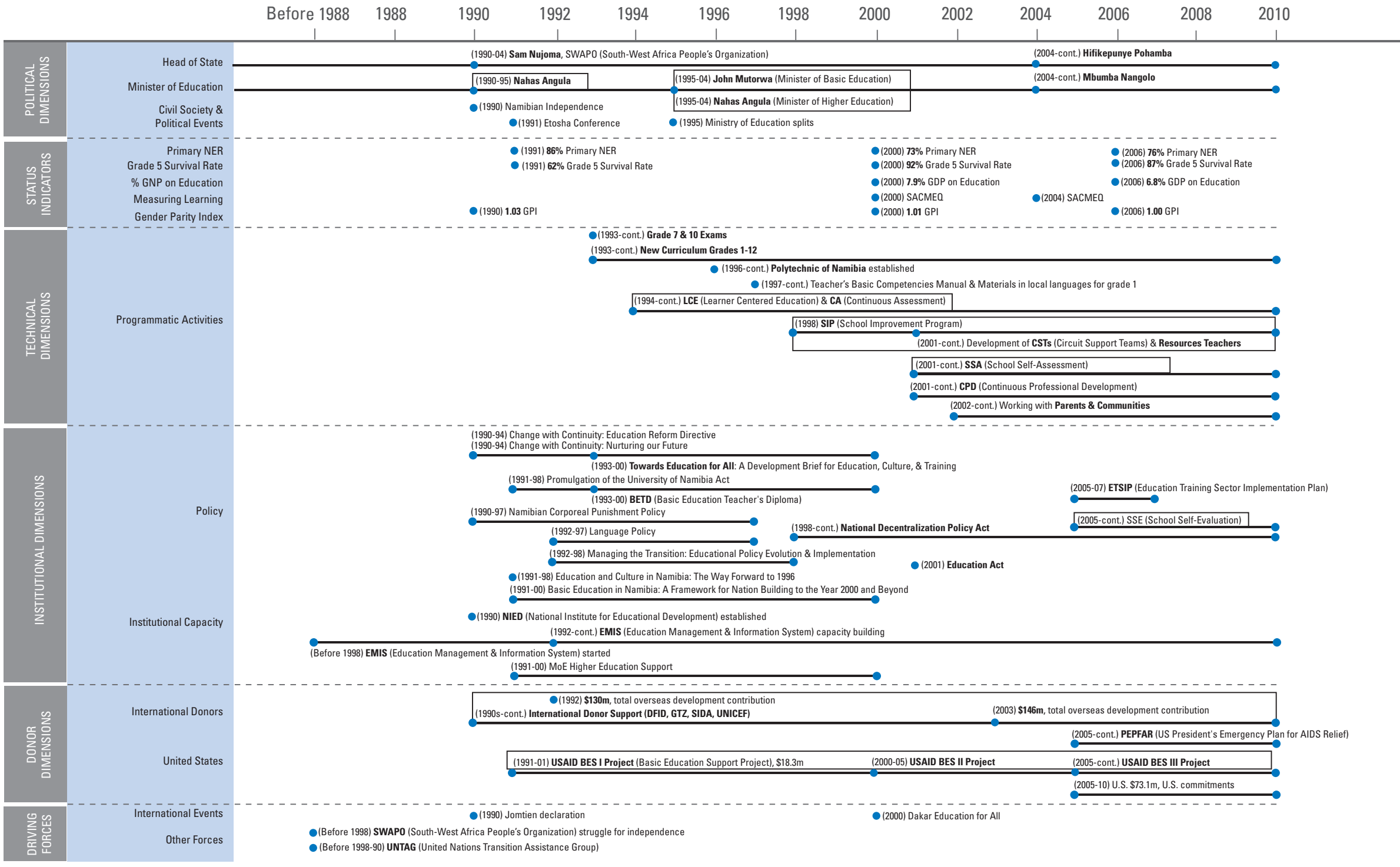
and as such enabled real ownership. Second, it provided a forum for regional educators to achieve visibility and credibility at the Ministry.

- The reforms were consistent with the philosophy and purpose of the government, and reinforced and supported the strategies of LCE and CA.

The long-term sustainability and success of the reforms—and improvements in student learning—are still to be achieved. The expansion from the Northern regions to the full country, with different cultures and different challenges, will require a continuing process of adaptation and deep learning and ownership. The most significant obstacle of successful scaling up will be if the reforms are seen as a technical tool rather than a reculturing of the idea of supervision and school support. The organizational and financial constraints to holding regular regional workshops could limit opportunities for professional reflection.

NAMIBIA TIMELINE

Namibia Time Line



Nicaragua: *Summary*

COUNTRY CONTEXT

In Nicaragua, the divisions from the civil conflict in the 1980s have continued to influence the policies and practice of education reform. Without the consistency of strong educational leadership and a national vision, Nicaragua's progress is more sporadic and dependent on the continuity of donor support. Dramatic reforms like autonomous schools are still playing out in the national debates. Despite these challenges, demonstrably effective Active Schools (Escuelas Activas or EA) reforms have been continuously supported by successive governments and ministers, and have survived even the transition from a Liberal to a Sandinista government. A review of the reforms that occurred under the administrations during the last 20 years illustrates how the implementation of successful programs underlay the subsequent policy framework, and how ultimately the continuity of programs garnered and hinged on local and international support.

REFORM GOALS

In general, the goals of the Ministry of Education (MINED)[1] have fluctuated with political administration, a trend obvious in the transition from the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to Violeta Chamorro's administrations and the National Opposition Union party (UNO). At the time, the Ministry of Education did not have a coherent vision for education, or stable and consistent staff. Rather the early reform initiatives were promoted and dependent on a few key personalities (ministers or certain strong figures within MINED), the most notable being Humberto Belli, Minister of Education in the Chamorro and Alemán administrations. Ideologically, the MECD under Belli valued individualistic goals and individual moral responsibility, as opposed to the collective and mass participatory ideals of education under the FSLN (Gershberg, 2002). Nicaragua, with support from international donors, engaged in widespread

1 The current government, elected in 2007 uses the acronym MINED. Under the prior governments the Ministry was the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, the MECD.

decentralization of the social sectors, which underlay most of major initiatives that took place during the 1990s and was a departure from the centralized management system in place under the Sandinistas.

The MINED has adopted a new education vision. After the reelection in 2007, the FLSN has taken on issues of equity as a main platform. The administration's criticism of the decentralization-based reforms are related to the inequities experienced by poorer families by the imposition of school fees, an element of the autonomous schools (Gershberg, 2002). The aim of the current government is thus to re-centralize education (Porta and Laguna, 2007).

Strategies

The main education reform was Belli's *Autonomia Escolar* (Autonomous Schools Program or ASP), which sought to transfer the management of schools from the central Ministry of Education to the local level (Fuller and Rivarola, 1998). This main effort was coupled with a *Transformación Curricular*, a curriculum reform designed to eliminate the Sandinista revolutionary ideas and images and institute a morals and values component (AED, 1998). In addition, efforts were made to bring the Ministry of Education up-to-date, increasing the efficiency of its operations through updating software and creating databases for accessing information available to central and local level Ministry of Education offices.

When the MECD launched the ASP in 1993, garnering much international support from the World Bank and other donors, there was no institutional support or legal framework that outlined the MECD's goals and visions for education, or the ways that reforms should take shape. The main proponent in many ways for the ASP, Belli, wanted to increase the efficiency of the education system, and make it more accountable to parents and communities. Later, local buy-in and donor support reinforced the direction toward decentralization although programs expanded to include instructional quality reforms and teacher capacity building, and bilingual education for the Atlantic Coast (AED, 1998; USAID, 2005).

Transferring all powers of school management over to school-based governing councils, ASP is considered "one of the most radical educational decentralization experiments in Latin America" (Gershberg, 1999). School-based councils became responsible for the daily functioning of the school institution, including decisions regarding how to use the fiscal transfers made to the school by the central ministry, the hiring and firing of teachers, and the curriculum (Fuller and Rivarola, 1998). It was meant to empower parents and community members with respect to education, thus making the system more accountable to local levels, and thus increasing the efficiency and quality of the system (Fuller and Rivarola, 1998).

ASP won the support of donor agencies that provided funds and technical support for capacity building for decentralization at all levels of the Ministry of Education.

Another strategy that was part of the decentralization push was municipalization, which involved fiscal transfers to the municipality to administer limited school responsibilities. This initiative was short lived, in part because it competed with the ASP. This kind of control at the municipal level undermined the role and authority of the school councils (Gershberg, 2002). In political terms, it meant giving power to Sandinistas who held many municipal-level positions.

When the MECD launched initiatives early in the 1990s, there was not a clear vision of what the education system should look like. There was no policy framework of the system's mission, goals, directions, or reform strategies, a factor that might have actually contributed to the success of the ASP program (Gershberg 2002)[2]. Rather, the development of school directive councils was launched, and workshops and capacity building programs were done with community members, parents, teachers, and local level ministry officials in order to communicate the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the system. Councils of parents, teachers, and community members, whose involvement in education was a founding tenet of school autonomy assumed decision-making responsibilities. The ASP program garnered international donor support early on even though only later, in 2002 did the Ministry articulate the rights and roles of each stakeholder and guidelines about how council should work in the *Ley de Participación Educativa*, the Education Participation Law (MECD, 2002). Additionally, the administration of Arnoldo Aleman brought on Belli as minister, the only one who was reappointed from the previous administration; a factor that solidified political support for the ASP (Gershberg, 2002).

As the direction of education reform was established, the *Plan Nacional de Educación 2000-2015* outlined the direction and goals for educational development until 2015 and was to be the basis for education policies (MECD, 2004b). It communicates the principles of the education system, and affirmed a participatory and decentralized education structure as an overarching tenet of the system (MECD, 2004b). The National Plan also acknowledges a commitment to meet the Education for All goals by the target date of 2015 (MECD, 2004b). The *Ley General de Educación*, the General Education Law, articulated a mission and vision for the education system, which include the various modalities in the system (primary/secondary education, adult education, teacher education, higher

2 For a broader discussion of the ways the lack of a policy framework might have influenced the successes of reform initiatives, see Gershberg (2002).

education, etc), strategies for education quality, and the qualities that education sought to reinforce in individuals and communities (MECD, 2006).

Most recently, the newly elected MINED has articulated a commitment to do away with the ASP and re-centralize the education system (Porta and Laguna, 2007). Its main critique is an equity argument based on the imposition of school fees by primary and secondary schools. Under ASP, schools were allowed to impose fees to supplement the fiscal transfers from the central ministry, and while they were "voluntary" for primary school, there were instances where students were prohibited from class if they were not able to pay them (Gershberg, 2002). This equity issue is one main concern and part of the policy platform for the new administration.

Classroom level reform efforts were initiated through various donor programs. One of the largest and long-term efforts, the *Escuelas Activas* reform, introduced an active learning methodology, instruction that incorporates group and self-paced learning, teachers as facilitators of learning, community involvement, and democratic behaviors, through the support of USAID. In 1993 USAID initiated support to the Ministry of Education and has maintained its commitment through several administrations. USAID partnered with the Ministry of Education to transform the education system from the classroom level up, starting with Nicaragua Basic Education Projects BASE I and II, and continuing with the EQUIP1 EXCELENCIA Project. The continuity and effectiveness of the EA have resulted in the MINED's decision to institutionalize and expand the model to all schools across the country.

Impact

The education system has improved since the early 1990s in terms of access and completion. The primary enrollment increased from 70 to 90, and survival to Grade 5 has improved, although a still serious dropout problem continues. Overall, the efficiency of the system is still an issue, with relatively high levels of repetition and dropout. No learning outcome measures were available for comparison.

Nicaragua Education Indicators

GER Primary	91%	100%	116%
Survival to Grade 5	44%	48%	54%
Teacher Pupil Ratio	32:1	34:1	33:1
Gender Equity Ratio (Girls:Boys)—Primary	1.06	1.01	.98
Education as % of govt budget	-	6%	-
$ Per pupil, current spending			$331

CASE ANALYSIS: DIMENSIONS OF REFORM

Technical Dimensions

USAID, the World Bank, and other donors have supported various educational reforms and system improvements in Nicaragua; initiatives have focused on strategic planning, decentralization, financial management, information and decision systems, learning materials and textbooks, and disaster recovery, among other topics. Two core long-term reform initiatives that began at approximately the same time, the Autonomous Schools Program and the *Escuelas Activas* initiative, stand out and are deserving of particular attention.

In 1990 the new Minister of Education, Humberto Belli, immediately spearheaded the ASP in an effort to improve school quality while reversing the heavily centralized Sandinista Ministry of Education. Supported by the World Bank, which advocated decentralization of education and funded the program, Minister Belli became a champion of this reform effort and moved it quickly from a pilot to a national reform effort. The *consejos* directives established under ASP allowed local boards to adjust the curriculum and address technical issues such as testing, but due to a lack of capacity in these areas, the initiative eventually concentrated more on administrative areas such as the collection of school fees and hiring and firing of teachers. This project continued until it was ended under the current Minister of Education.

In 1993, USAID's program of support to the Ministry of Education initiated more a decade of commitment to educational system reform in Nicaragua. The centerpiece of the USAID-supported Nicaraguan education reforms was at the

school and classroom level, establishing effective models of school management and student-centered teaching in the classroom. The BASE Projects introduced a method of active instruction adapted from the *Escuela Nueva* model to meet the needs of Nicaragua. The model was specifically designed to address the needs of teachers working in the most disadvantaged rural, multi-grade schools, where all grades are taught together in one room, but it is also effective in larger, urban schools. From an initial start in 40 model schools in 1995, the project has expanded over time through additional model schools and through a network of satellite schools linked to each model school, reaching 170 schools at the end of the BASE II Project in 2005 and 3,015 in 2009. The program currently supports 48 percent of the country's primary school students. Along with the formal expansion network of mentors schools and satellite schools, teachers who are reassigned to new schools have often carried the reforms with them and in this way increased the overall receptiveness of the program across the country and expanded the reach of the project. The program now reaches all municipalities in the country and is currently being institutionalized in the Ministry as part of the Minister's model for quality education.

Institutional Dimensions

Education in Nicaragua has often been highly politicized, and for much of the time period from 1990 to the present, the central-level Nicaraguan Ministry of Education was institutionally weak and did not develop or articulate a clear and consensus-based policy framework that defined national priorities and commitments. Frequent changes in Ministers, the tendency to discontinue policies started by predecessors, and the lack of technical capacity and financial resources that beset the Ministry have limited the Ministry of Education's institutional effectiveness. Certain Ministers of Education, such as Humberto Belli and Silvio de Franco, however, did exhibit strong leadership that proved instrumental to the implementation of policies.

For example, the Autonomous Schools Policy (ASP) was a high-profile program that was a priority for Minister Belli, and he was able to initiate, implement, and expand it rapidly. In part this was due to the absence of an initial legal framework, as Minister Belli was able to implement ASP right away using only ministerial directives. As opposed to having established a legal framework before implementation of the programs, the ministry was afforded some flexibility and time for trial and error before its institutionalization into policy (Gershberg, 2002). Had he waited for the legal framework to be in place, ASP never would have expanded to national level as quickly as it did. Additionally, Minister Belli's drive and conviction, and his ability and willingness to work closely with donors, were instrumental in the establishment and rapid implementation of the program.

Though the strong leadership of Minister Belli put the Autonomous Schools Policy in place, he and the Ministers who followed did not garner broad-based support for the ASP. For example, the primary teacher's union, ANDEN, strongly opposed ASP. No space for union voice was provided on the school councils, and the union felt that the ASP undermined their role. The ASP lacked the widespread support of teachers and when the Sandinistas returned to power in 2007, the new Minister of Education, Miguel de Castilla, ended the ASP based on concerns regarding the exclusionary aspect of school fees.

Building gradually from a small, low-profile start working in 40 model schools in 1995, the EA reforms have spread, building deep national support at the school, municipal, and national level, and influencing national policy. One test of the sustainability of the reform efforts came with the change in administration in 2007. Minister de Castilla immediately began reversing course from the previous administration, ending the ASP and suspending all teacher-training programs. In response, actors at the various levels spoke up in support of the EA reforms. When Minister de Castilla visited schools, teachers explained to him what they gained from the active schools program. At public meetings, directors and teachers requested that the Minister allow the program to keep training teachers and to accept the new national curriculum. Ultimately, the Minister listened to the requests and after learning more about the methodology of the project, decided to scale up the active schools approach to all schools in the country (de Castilla, MINED 2009).

Political Dimensions

Education is and has been conflicted political terrain in Nicaragua. The trend over the last 30 years has been a change of platforms, rhetoric, policies and practice paralleling a change of political party in office. When a new party comes to power, it works to 'undo' or 'fix' the work of the previous administration due to ideological differences.

When Violeta Chamorro was elected in Nicaragua in 1990, the country was emerging from a decade of war, natural disaster and severe economic decline. Education during the Somoza dictatorship (1936-1979) had been the privilege of a very small upper class that maintained power over Nicaragua's political processes and economic resources (Arnove, 1986). As the FSLN took power, they confronted an education system that heavily favored more urban and developed areas, to the great neglect of the rural areas, where 75 percent of the population was not literate, and only just more than half of all primary age students were not enrolled in school (Arnove, 1986). The Sandinistas envisioned education as a tool to promote mass participation in the development of the country and to

politically empower the population, the majority of whom had been marginalized by the Somozas (Arnove, 1995). They were tasked with rebuilding the entire system and had neither the experience or expertise, nor economic resources to take on such a task even though education was one of the government's main priorities (Carnoy and Samoff, 1990). Still, early on the Sandinistas instituted popular education programs, special education programs, a widespread literacy campaign, among others, and focused heavily on increasing access to schooling for the most marginalized. The development of the RAAN and RAAS regions of the Atlantic Coast, separated along ethnic and geographic lines from the Pacific Coast, was a challenge for the FSLN since the region had functioned more or less autonomously throughout Nicaragua's history (The Autonomy Commission, 1985). The FSLN launched bilingual education programs (Arnove, 1986) specifically conceived to reach the population of the Atlantic Coast, but were not able to establish broad political support, and in 1987 granted the Coast autonomy (MECD, 2004a; The Autonomy Commission, 1985). Nationally, in response to the Contra War, the government prioritized defense to the neglect of the social sectors. Violeta Chamorro, who espoused renewed relations with the international donor community and promised stability and economic development, inherited a system that still suffered many of the same challenges that the Sandinistas had encountered upon taking over leadership in 1979. Chamorro's party, the UNO (National Opposition Union) was a coalition of 14 parties unified in political opposition to the FSLN, but lacking a coherent party policy platform.

A recent example of the extent to which education has become politicized in Nicaragua is demonstrated in the recent changeover to a Sandinista administration. Within the first days of the Minister de Castilla's term he put an end to autonomous schools, citing examples of corruption at the local level and the inequity of school fees. Even Ministry documents from the current administration often include subjective political commentary alongside technical education rhetoric. For example, the Minister de Castilla's "Proposal for an Integrated and Global Model of Inclusive Basic and Middle Education" states that the Neo-Liberals' ASP program has created "malignant tumors" in the administration of school centers (de Castilla, 2009).

THE ROLE OF DONORS

The Ministry of Education of Nicaragua has relied heavily on the financial support of international donors over the years. While the education budget covers mainly salaries, the Ministry has traditionally relied on donors to help them carry out their initiatives. The international donors supported the decentralization

reform. Starting from the early 1990s and ASP, until 2007, through continued projects, donors including USAID, the World Bank and others, have advanced the Ministry's push toward decentralization and the improved quality of schools. A Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), initiated in 2003, aimed to coordinate donor resources and ministry efforts in education precisely toward those ends (MECD, 2004a).

Several former Ministers of Education felt that without donor money they simply could not implement any policy. For example, ASP relied heavily on funds from the World Bank to help build capacity at the local level. When the funds ceased, the critical capacity building activities also ended. The training did not continue at the level and for the time period needed to institutionalize the ASP.

Through the change in administrations, donor support in Nicaragua has provided the continuity to allow reforms to take hold. USAID has provided 16 years of support for EA reform allowing for a gradual scale up of reform and helping build a broad base of support as the program involved actors at different levels in the system from teachers to technical advisors in the Ministry. The current USAID project, EXCELENCIA, has reached every region and municipality in the country and includes multi-grade and graded (or regular) schools as well as private schools. By supporting a bottom-up approach and working low profile, the EA reform survived the changeover of administrations, Ministry personnel, teachers, school directors, as well as program and USAID staff. In essence, USAID programming in Nicaragua created a space for reform change through the continuity and broad-based deep ownership of classroom reforms.

CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, the education system in Nicaragua has undergone substantial turnover at all levels of the system—particularly at the sub-minister levels. Unlike El Salvador, it has fluctuated between strong and weak Ministry leadership. Perhaps the most dominant aspect of education in Nicaragua has been the divisive and partisan nature of education reform. In Nicaragua, education has been a point of conflict between political parties, the Ministry, and the unions. The flagship initiative of this period, the Autonomous Schools Program, was also the focal point of political disagreement. The most important and potentially longest lasting reform initiated in this period, Active Schools, is the result of consistent USAID support over sufficient time to develop the technical and institutional foundation for better rural schools.

Darvin
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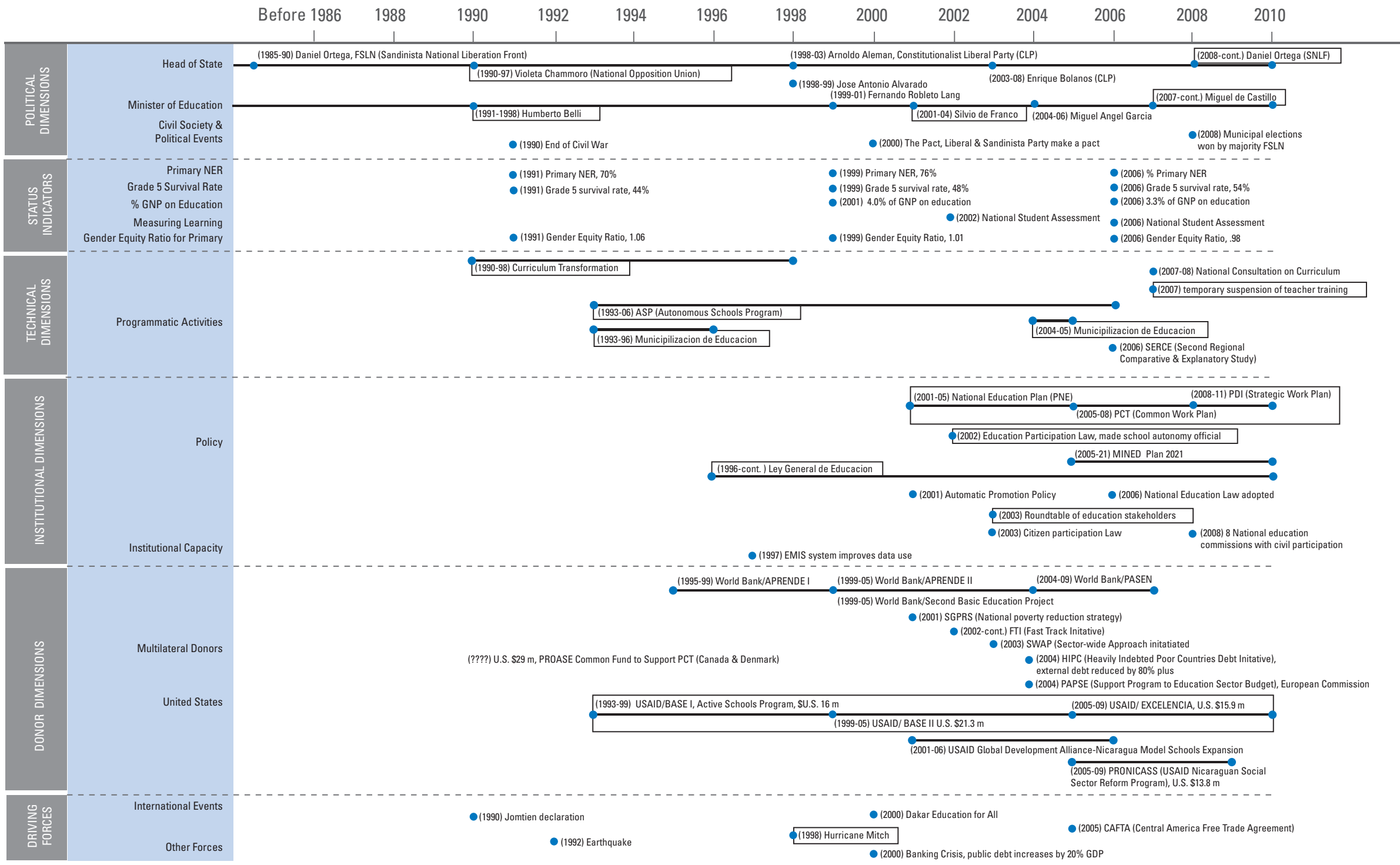
NICARAGUA TIMELINE

Nicaragua Time Line



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Zambia: *Summary*

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Following a decade of post-colonial economic growth and development, Zambia became a one-party state in 1972 under the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and President Kenneth Kaunda. In 1975, Zambia's economic fortunes plummeted with the world decline in the price of copper, Zambia's main export; the next 15 years saw negligible GDP growth, high rates of joblessness and the increasingly inability of the state to finance basic health, sanitation and education services to its citizens. By the late 1980s, movements supporting Zambia's transition to a multiparty democracy gathered strength. These movements, rooted in resistance to the corrupt one-party state, reaction to the ongoing economic turmoil, and a popular hope that a change in political and economic philosophy would bring greater prosperity to Zambia supported Zambia's transition to a multi-party democracy in 1991 and a new era of reform. Zambia remains one of the poorest countries in the world: its GNI per capita declined from USD 590 in 1975 to USD 300 in 2000. In the early 2000s, Zambia's economy began to grow and Zambia reached its HIPC Completion Point—releasing it from 15 years of the restrictions and conditionalities of Structural Adjustment, and the majority of its external debt.

The state of Zambia's education sector in 1991 was influenced by the copper crisis, Zambia's subsequent economic decline, the deterioration of government institutions and services, and the increasing demand for education. In the decade following the copper collapse, population growth, at 3.3 percent, far outstripped economic

> The government has financed the growing education sector by reducing the real incomes of teachers, allowing a withering away of public funds from all but the most essential salary payments, relying more heavily from contributions from the community and participation by the private sector, and turning to foreign aid for general budgetary support. At the Ministry level, a decline in Inspectorate capacity (measured in terms of inspector: teacher ratio) over the decade, an ongoing shortage of executive staff and a culture in the planning unit that focused on policies supporting system expansion prevailed.
>
> —From *Education in a Declining Economy: The Case of Zambia 1975-1985* by Michael Kelley

growth; primary enrollment expanded by 54 percent to 1.3m; and educational quality, as measured by overall success rates in Primary 7 leaving examinations, deteriorated. The education sector in the late 1980s was described as near collapse with one MOE policymaker noting, "Most of the infrastructure was in total disrepair; there was a dearth of textbooks; teachers were highly demotivated. When you look at the infrastructure, it was like we are in a war zone."

In 1991, Donors primarily worked at the provincial or sub-provincial level, often not in coordination with the MOE's central education office.

REFORM GOALS

The election of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) as the governing party in 1991 marked a significant political and economic transition in the Zambia's history. The new administration campaigned on philosophies of Liberalization, Privatization, and Decentralization. One current policymaker saw the transition as "a deliberate attempt to break away from the second republic…an overreaction to the one-party state, the socialist drive." Along with liberalization, a policy of cost sharing was implemented, ending government monopoly on primary education provision and free primary education.[1] These philosophies, along with EFA, were the foundation for the National Education Policy, *Educating Our Future*. The policy was founded on seven main principles: Liberalization, Decentralization, Equality, Equity, Quality, Partnerships, and Accountability, and outlines sector goals with significant emphasis on the attainment of Universal Basic Education (Grades 1–9); producing well rounded learners; building Ministry of Education management and technical capacity and rationalizing resource mobilization and utilization. Since its ratification by Parliament in 1996, *Educating Our Future* has served as the guiding document for the sector and, as such, the foundation for three successive sector investment programs.

Reform goals central to this case study of Zambia are:

- Liberalization and Cost-Sharing—driven by an interest of increasing access to primary school access and a recognition of the government limited financial resources;
- Decentralization—specifically creation of District Education Boards and capacity development at the de-central level;

1 Under a liberalized education system, the right of private organizations, individuals, religious bodies, and local communities to establish and control their own schools and other educational institutions is recognized and welcomed. (*Educating Our Future*)

- Partnership—specifically, within the context of MOE sector leadership and its engagement with donor development partners; and
- Strengthening MOE Capacity and Systems—specifically, supporting management, finance and administrative activities; data collection, analysis and review; and policy and planning at the central and de-central levels has strengthened.

The emphasis on privatization, community participation, and cost-sharing in the education sector drew on the assessment of the broad mobilization required to support the expansion of quality primary education within a context of severely constrained resources. *Focus on Learning* (1992) notes, "Community participation ...is not just an emergency stop-gap measure in times of financial difficulty. It is a preferred alternative in its own right, promising greater accountability and more efficiency." *Educating Our Future* (1996) elaborates on system support, noting, "[the MOE] will assist communities and voluntary organizations that wish to develop their own schools." The liberalization of service provision overturned a 1972 Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) policy that had determined government as the sole provider of education, and allowed civil society organizations, communities, and private entities to open schools. Decentralization, as outlined in Educating Our Future, prioritized devolution of power to decentralized levels, including districts and schools, in an effort to support more effective and efficient planning, management, and implementation of programs delivering basic education, reduce delay in decision-making and implementation of policies, and cater for a greater degree of democracy in system management and administration. Partnership goals are elaborated in the next section.

Strategies

Educating Our Future provided foundation for subsequent sector programs, arguably the primary vehicles for driving the reform agenda in Zambia: The Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Program (BESSIP), 1999-2002; The Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (MOESP), 2003-2007; The Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP) 2006-2010; and the Joint Assistance Strategy—Zambia, 2007-2010. Over the reform period, donor agencies more often than not drove their engagement and activities through MOE programs. However, many continued to support activities outside of Ministry-led channels. Despite the hope for reform embedded in the 1991 transition, the Chiluba era was marked by corruption and continuing economic stagnation. One practitioner notes: "In 1995, it was impossible to tell the number of teachers we had to the Ministry of Finance." Another recounts that even as donors were coming in, fresh examples of low

accountability and corruption led donors to conduct an audit, the results of which 'were pathetic.' After an initial effort at a full SWAp in the mid-1990s, the Ministry and donors negotiated and developed the Basic Education sub-Sector Investment Program (BESSIP).

The BESSIP goal of improving *primary access and learning outcomes for all children* was supported by activities increasing inputs (teachers, classrooms, resources to government and community schools); donor conditionalities influencing change in resource-allocation and decentralization policies, activities strengthening of Ministry systems and capacities and the development of platforms for dialogue between donors and MOE. BESSIP marked a transition in external support—from a preponderantly projectized environment to hybridized environment where donor development partners financial and technical support were guided by the SWAp. Under BESSIP, donor agencies provided technical assistance, resources, and projectized support to EMIS, decentralization, community schools, literacy and testing, infrastructure and school materials, and teacher professional development.

To allay donor fears of corruption and weak MOE accounting and management systems, BESSIP was implemented through a Program Implementation Unit (PIU), which operated parallel to the MOE. Donor interest in supporting community schools and concern of MOEST capacity, led them to create the Zambia Community Schools Secretariat, an advocacy body for community schools, in 1997. A study funded by UNICEF, (Cashen, 2001) reflects the tone of donor engagement with MOEST during the BESSIP era.

> Community initiatives to provide children with a basic education emerged in response to the [poor] state of government-run primary education. In the face of the government's declining capacity to educate all of Zambia's children, the government of Zambia has begun to recognize the importance of community schools (Cashen, 2001).

The MOESP and FNDP focus on the entire sector, highlight areas for institutional and systems development and Ministry leadership in policy and planning cycles (as opposed to prioritizing direct service delivery and inputs). MOESP and FNDP emphasis on Ministry priorities and leadership reflect the change in the donor environment (including the departure of the World Bank as a driving force in the sector, the trend toward harmonization and country ownership, and away from conditionalities), the transition of the presidency in 2002 to Levy Mwanawasa (and subsequently reduced donor fears of corruption), and Zambia's economic recovery which started in 2003.

Two characteristics of the 2003-2008 era should be noted: the extent to which Ministry has built on the BESSIP experience, and the change in Ministry engagement of Cooperating Partners and Technical Assistance. At the start of the MOESP, many of the Ministry staff that had worked in the BESSIP PIU transitioned to leadership roles in the Ministry bringing with them the technical, management, and planning experiences. In the transition to MOESP, MOE use of donor technical assistance (TA) became more demand driven, with a focus on using donor TA for capacity building and later providing expertise based on identified needs. As the SWAp has evolved donors continued to prioritize certain types of support including support to Community Schools, EMIS, institutional strengthening and reaching Zambia's most disadvantaged youth; and remain engaged in the policy and planning dialogue with continued funding for research, analysis and institutional reviews. Much of this support, though aligned with broader MOEST goals and strategies, was programmed through project mechanisms.

In the case of community schools, the collapse of the Zambia Community Schools Secretariat (ZCSS) in 2005, the presence of USAID projects working on community schools and community schools policy at all levels, and the availability of USAID FTI funding provided a critical juncture and opportunity for donors and the MOEST to support the integration of these schools into the system. Previously, ZCSS was looked to address issues of community school oversight and management. Between 2006 and 2008, donors provided technical assistance to the Ministry to develop of a policy framework for community schools, support revision of the 1966 Education Act to support the legal establishment of these schools, and include community schools into the Ministry's Fifth National Development Plan Implementation Framework. This work has helped create an enabling policy environment and clear guidelines for Ministry oversight of community schools, and has more fully integrated them into Ministry management and administrative systems.

Selected Reform Goals, Policy Changes and Programmatic Support

Reform Goals	Policy Changes	Programmatic Support (BESSIP, MOESP, FNDP, JASZ)	Impact
Partnership	Establishment of new governance and financial management structures facilitating MOE and Cooperating Partner (CP) coordination	Driving program and strategy development, coordination and management through partnership structures	- Development of MOE systems and capacities for planning, management and administration - Hybridized funding approach with several venues for CP-MOE cooperation on planning and technical issues. - Development of a culture of joint planning and management
Liberalization / Cost-Sharing	Overturn MOE policy stipulating GRZ as the sole provider of Education; Primary Schools allowed to charge fees; encouragement of non-GRZ education providers	Directing resources and management support to community schools; encouraging community participation; formalizing MOE relationships with community school bodies	- Enrollment stagnation in government primary schools (1991-2000) - Expansion of community schools (1991-2006)
Decentralization	Policy directing establishment, composition and responsibilities of DEBs	Directing resources to DEBs and schools; support to DEB capacity building	MOE remains highly centralized.

Critical factors influencing the development and articulation strategies and programs designed to meet reform goals were Zambia's economic position, structural adjustment strictures, donor influence and priorities, external confidence on issues of accountability and corruption within the Zambian Government. MOEST management and administrative capacity, and the legal framework guiding the education sector, specifically the Education Act (1966) and the Teacher Service Commission (TESC). These are discussed in subsequent sections.

Impact
This brief identifies five major sector changes during the reform era:

- Development of and consistent programming against the National Education Policy
- Primary Sector Expansion and Diversification of primary school operators
- Strengthened Institutional Capacity and System Integrity of the Ministry
- Increased sector leadership from MOE and coordination / integration of cooperating partner contributions
- Decentralization

The National Education Policy: *Educating Our Future* (1996) was developed almost 15 years ago to provide guidelines for programming both Zambian and external funds against defined national priorities. Since that time, the plan has been the basis for three successive sector investment programs.

Primary Sector Expansion and Diversification of primary school operators: Following enrollment stagnation in the 1990s, Zambian primary enrollment and supporting infrastructure realized significant expansion from 2002-2008. Between 2002-2006 primary school enrollment expanded by over one million students. Community schools accounted for almost half of the enrollment expansion and by 2006, community schools accounted for 30 percent of schools in Zambia and 16 percent of primary enrollees (up from less than 1 percent in the early 1990s). From the perspective of geographic coverage, community schools had become increasingly a part of the system, with community schools making up between 16 percent and 43 percent of all schools in urban and rural areas in all provinces.

Strengthened Institutional Capacity and System Integrity of the Ministry: Starting from *Educating Our Future*, the Ministry has a 12-year legacy of consistent and grounded sector planning, program implementation, management and systems administration and donor coordination experience. The succession of planning, implementation, and reviewing processes has realized a Ministry with increased capacity at the central and non-central level, strengthened the integrity of MOE systems, and helped the Ministry develop the tools and fora to lead inclusive planning and coordinated, regular evaluation of system performance. Of note: the Ministry EMIS system has become recognized as a common source of data for the Ministry and donor policy dialogue and joint assessment reviews.

Increased sector leadership from MOE and coordination/integration of cooperating partner contributions: The Ministry of Education now leads sector planning, monitoring and policy review/dialogue activities with donor development partners offering hybridized financial and technical support with most sector activities are driven through Ministry channels. The reform period saw the evolution of the MOE-donor (now Cooperating Partner) working relationship. MOE now leads regular planning, review and monitoring activities that are informed by systems inputs and data, are inclusive of key stakeholders and mindful of donor capacities, interests and potential contributions. There remains regular debate and, at times, significant tension over Ministry policy direction and sector management. Additionally, a narrative of low institutional capacity, transparency, and accountability in the Ministry remains a part of the reform dialogue. Some argue that this is a narrative that needs to be heard; others suggest that highlighting this narrative is damaging to the relationship of trust between stakeholders at the donor and Ministry Headquarters levels. Despite the continuing capacity issues, however, donors and Ministry staff have sought to work within the realistic constraints and toward a partnership with clear expectations and roles.

During the reform period, donor support to discrete activities that extended beyond a normal project lifecycle (e.g. EMIS, Community Schools, Decentralization, Policy and Research) have been integrated into the MOE Institutional Framework as MOE has developed systems, capacity and interest to support them. Projects remain a mechanism through which donors, including USAID, have supported, and have been seen as useful in offering timely, flexible, and targeted technical and systems strengthening support. In several cases, these projects played a role in initiating, or stimulating change, and demonstrated an understanding of the political or institutional environment. Donor activities that have not been sustained or found an institutional home within the MOEST include input or resource-heavy activities, or those that did not find a constituency within the MOE. While valuable or technically sound (e.g. aspects of ZATEC or one of the many reading /literacy programs), these projects often focused on the technical without appreciating the institutional or political levers required to support their integration into the system.

Decentralization: BESSIP decentralization activities supported the establishment of District Education Boards (DEBs) in 72 districts, decentralization of payroll and implementation of a school grants program. Initially DEBs were not seen as having the resources or capacities required for them to carry out new roles. And in 2004 and 2005 implementation of large procurements was recentralized and concerns about absorptive (and spending) capacity became a part of the policy

dialogue. Even so, there is general agreement that within the context of ongoing devolution, capacity at the local levels has grown. Schools and zones increasingly look to DEBS (as opposed to the central ministry or division offices) to address problems, planning, and capacity needs.

Despite these changes, several of the incentives and drivers in the education system are not oriented toward increasing students' learning outcomes. Factors that did make a difference at the school level: school grants, increase in teacher supply, schools built, decentralization of payroll and establishment of DEBs have not been proven to improve learning outcomes. Zambia remains fairly described as a 'low cost, low quality' system; Zambia regularly ranks among the lowest in SACMEQ in reading and math. A new regular standards testing regime, the Grade 4 pupils reaching desirable levels in English and math. Even so, it is notable that no deterioration in learning outcomes was observed during the expansion period, and community school students, though a highly diverse group, have posted test scores that have surpassed, or closely aligned with those in government schools.

Zambia Education Indicators

GER Primary	93%	80%	117%
Completion Primary	-	56%	78%
GER Secondary	15%	20%	30%
Gross Intake Rate—Primary	-	84%	122%
Repetition Rate–Primary	-	6.1%	6.9%
Education as % of GNP	2.7%	2.0%	2.1%

CASE ANALYSIS: DIMENSIONS OF REFORM

Technical Dimensions

The BESSIP and post-BESSIP periods have been described as suffering from 'reformitis'—the disease of having too many reforms. Chileshe *et al* note "MOE has been a particular victim of this ailment as not only did

it have to cope with major government reforms (public service, financial management, decentralization) but it was also engaged on its own major sector reform programs" (Copenhagen 2007). BESSIP implementation prioritized technical- and input-based aspects of reform and was manifested in five program components: supporting instructional material and bursary distribution (including grants and bursaries providing specific support to community schools), infrastructure development (including community driven construction), reforming primary teacher training, revising the primary school curriculum, and strengthening MOE systems through organizational restructuring, decentralization and EMIS development. The BESSIP years also saw: a) the introduction of new literacy programs that use of mother tongue instruction in early grades to support literacy acquisition; b) implementation of the National Assessment System Program, a Grade 5 Math, English and Zambian language proficiency test; and c) development of an EMIS system ensures that data from all schools is collected on an annual basis and fed into MOEST policy and decision-making channels. A number of the technical interventions, including those supporting teacher professional development, curriculum reform, and school health programs were not systemically sustained. The Zambia Teacher Education Course (ZATEC) created under BESSIP (1999-2001) doubled the number of primary teachers in school. The impact of this program on teacher quality is uncertain, and post-BESSIP, the model has changed, as financing the BESSIP-supported model was not considered sustainable.

Institutional Dimensions

The National Education Policy, rooted in the 1991 democratic transition, has provided the education sector with consistent vision and guidance since being approved by Parliament in 1996, and has been the cornerstone on which the MOE has developed three successive implementation programs. It has also supported the opening-up of the MOE institutional framework to include space for decentralization and community school reforms. The development and slow process of institutionalization over the 15-year period of reform was supported by development of MOE HQ and donor governance structures, targeting of MOE and donor programmatic, financial and human resources, and the maturation of processes as the DEBs, community schools, SWAp governance structures, and MOE planning activities became rooted in the system.

Change in the institutional landscape on the issues of decentralization and community schools over the last 15 years has happened within the context of a restrictive legal environment framed by the 1966 Education Act. Several changes that have been operationalized that are supporting the reform agenda

have not yet been written into Zambian law. These changes, which include the establishment of education boards, have been made by statutory instruments as transitional elements. Without legal establishment of Education Boards or Community Schools, the MOE lacked formal mechanisms and channels through which to enforce accountability. The presence of the TESC severely hindered the Ministry's efficient management of teachers. TESC review of teacher disciplinary issues often left teachers who had committed serious offences at schools for up to two years before a transfer was issued. The power a community has to hire and fire teachers is seen as an advantage of community schools vis-à-vis non-community schools. The draft of a revised version of the Education Act, formally establishing Education Boards, identifying the legality of community schools and abolishing the Teacher Service Commission (TESC) was begun in 2001. The Revised Education Act (2008) is currently being considered by Parliament; it formally establishes Education Boards and Community Schools; and abolishes the TESC, which would improve MOE flexibility and efficiency in teacher management.

The 3000+ community schools that have emerged over the past decade were outside the purview of the MOE. When the national coordinating body of community schools collapsed in 2006: There were no guidelines, no allocation of government resources, no structure of support to community schools - even though they represented 30 percent of the basic school population and nearly all the gains in enrollment/access over the past 8 years. Our Policy and Research Advisor worked with the MOE to design and coordinate the development of the national "Guidelines for Community Schools." Now districts are using those guidelines and supporting community schools, and can have the legal authority to provide resources and support. (DeStefano, EQUIP2, 2007)

Structural Adjustment and HIPC have also cast a shadow over the reform period. It is difficult to measure the extent to which the Structural Adjustment impeded or facilitated reform, however, the Ministry reorganization and hiring freezes in 2004 sapped both resources and morale at the headquarters level. Compounding this challenge was the painstakingly slow reorganization of the MOE as a part of the Public Sector Restructuring Program (2002-2005). The reorganization led to significant uncertainty about the future employment of each civil servant and often resulted in two MOE staff sharing the same position for extended periods of time, which limited the managerial effectiveness of MOE staff at all levels and left many in the MOE demoralized and less effective in leading change.

Critical to the development of institutional capacity was the BESSIP PIU, which initiated the re-development of MOE systems and experience in planning,

management and administration that had been lost, during the second republic (1972-1991). The development of activity-based budgeting, the medium-term expenditure framework and strategic planning were carried forward into the MOESP and the FNDP. According to a senior MOE advisor who served in the PIU during BESSIP:

> [In the BESSIP PIU] a number of factors that had to be done differently from the way the government was going on: Meeting of targets; monitoring goals; writing reports; accounting for resources. …There was a new work culture that was not so common to the MOE.

Capacity and leadership developed under BESSIP was retained as all but one MOE staff member supporting BESSIP was promoted during the MOESP period.

During the reform period, the MOE contribution the education budget has increased slightly in real terms, but dropped as a percentage of Zambia's GDP. Cooperating partner contribution has accounted for 20 to 35 percent of the education budget during the reform period. Concerns about MOE absorptive capacity of external funding rose during the first year of BESSIP, when, in 1999, only 19 percent of the pooled funds were actually spent." (Chisala and Cornelissen, 2003, p. 86)

Political Dimensions

The inconsistent strength of MOE leadership has resulted in the uneven articulation, management and implementation of programs supporting policy goals. During BESSIP development, concerns about weak leadership from the MOE and the dominant role of the World Bank were alleviated when the former Zambian vice-president became Minister of Education in December 1997 and "convened a conference with donors in February 1998 to give his clear vision and authority for the development of a sector program." The World Bank and MOE staffs cite this leadership as useful in giving potential donors a clear impression of government leadership of BESSIP. The focused support of the PIU and the then-Permanent Secretary provided further focus and clarity during BESSIP implementation. The presidential aspirations of the Minister during the run-up to the 2001 presidential election and subsequent departure of the Minster mid-way through BESSIP left a leadership vacuum. DEB capacity development and the perception of Zambia's education sector as being in the vanguard of decentralization in Zambia have been both assets and liabilities. Ongoing DEB capacitation and inclusion into MOE processes demonstrate the possibilities of decentralization. However opposition party gains in districts and provinces in 2006 made forward movement on decentralization unfeasible politically as the central government demonstrated reticence in decentralizing authority to political opponents.

Though President Mwanawasa made the fight against corruption a centerpiece of his presidency, the legacy of corruption from the regimes of Kenneth Kaunda and Frederick Chiluba (later found by Britain's High Court to have conspired to rob Zambia of about $46 million) heightened already conservative bureaucratic impulses guiding reform implementation. The decentralization of payroll from MOE HQ to the provinces and the implementation of the school grant system required the Ministry bureaucracy to take significant risks that could expose it to charges of corruption and misuse of funding. During BESSIP, pressure from donor organizations and the GRZ to spend resources helped initiate the grant making process.

Civil society and community engagement have successfully supported implicit decentralization through the community schools movement. This grassroots application of political will outside of MOE channels is consistent with Zambia's history of community support to schools, a response to providing education to the growing number of OVCs, and evidence of wide frustration regarding the MOE's limited provision of access to quality learning environments located close to communities.

> Under BESSIP we realized there are schools which cannot entirely be ignored. But it was a high risk. We didn't know if the school would be surviving in the next term, didn't know whether the grant would be used for the intended purpose. ...Even when we started education boards and sent grants to them, we had stories where head teachers who bought bicycles [who] did not fully use the money for the intended purpose. [Why did we take the risk?] For the simple fact it's better to move one step and correct yourself if there are errors. I am happy that the Ministry took that bold decision. Otherwise we wouldn't be where we are now in terms of financial transparency and financial accountability.
>
> —Senior Zambian Ministry of Education Official

Interaction across Dimensions

In some ways, the SWAp mechanism and the promotion of decentralization to community schools had competing implementation strategies, which served to confuse the nature of MOE support for local participation. Decentralization and creation and support of community schools sought to create local venues encouraging local participation. The development of the SWAp however consumed significant time, energy, and resources at the central level. Samoff notes, "In practice, SWAps become an obstacle to decentralization, accountability and local participation." Some criticisms of FBE include that, while FBE support participation of the poorest students, it can lower full participation of parents and communities at the school level. Despite some of these challenges, changes in institutional framework, engagement of civil society, support of community schools, and establishment of DEBs will be difficult to reverse. These changes have supported the increased inclusion of school and district stakeholders in

the education system and have limited, to some degree, control and political influence emanating from the MOE central office. The development and implementation of EMIS outlines the integration of a highly technical, externally supported activity that supported a change in the planning and management dialogue within the system.

In 2006, the Permanent Secretary, following her speech introducing the Joint Annual Review, was told that her comments were too data driven. Presently, domestic and international education specialists regularly use the MOE EMIS system as a common data platform to discuss policy issues and the MOE uses EMIS data to support advocacy with other GRZ departments, including the MoFNP. Increased use and confidence in EMIS systems in Zambia have evidenced the systems impact of community school growth and led to increased MOE recognition and support of community schools at all levels while also engaging districts in streamlined data collection and reporting activities have supported DEB inclusion into the MOE planning and decision-making system.

THE ROLE OF DONORS

Between 1975 and 1990 GRZ education expenditures decreased while external aid more than doubled. While the National Education Policy laid out a framework for education reform in the mid-1990s, donor resources supported the negotiation of into BESSIP that highlighted prioritizing primary education, shifting MOE resources toward the primary sub-sector, implementing through a SWAp and establishment of DEBs in all districts. During the reform period, MOE education expenditures ranged from 2 percent to 3 percent of the GDP, with external aid accounting for between 20-35 percent of annual education expenditures budget. Starting with the BESSIP, the GRZ expressed its desire for CPs to send their funding through direct budget support but remained flexible in allowing projectized and earmarked funding to support sector goals as well.

During the reform period donor organizations, led by the World Bank, supported the transition from a heavily projectized environment toward increased MOE-Cooperating Partner (CP) coordination through a SWAp and maintained significant resource inputs aligned with MOE sector priorities. With the close of BESSIP, the strengthening of the Zambian economy, the forgiveness of the majority of Zambia's debt, and the development of the Sector Plan, the CPs lost some levers and organizing fora afforded them by BESSIP. Even though CPs continued to contribute significant resources and technical assistance,

CP engagement with the MOE (through the JAR) is more consultative. Donor resource contribution and structural adjustment and HIPC strictures gave CPs s significant negotiating leverage in the first decade of the reform period; Zambia's improving economy and the development of a more robust SWAp appeared to support the emergence of strengthened Zambian institutions and vocalization of MOE priorities.

Debates over the range of education issues in the reform agenda between key actors over the allocation of scarce resources in the GRZ's most publicly visible Ministry are a regular feature of the CP-MOE relationship. Conflicting priorities between CPs and the MOE; CP concerns about MOE capacity, transparency, accountability, over-centralization and management; and in some cases, genuine disagreement, remain a characteristic of relationships between the MOE and the CPs. This dynamic of tension between the MOE and CPs has supported innovative change within the system, but also led to periods of mistrust and enmity. One actor notes, "I can't think of anything major that has moved without the CPs pushing. Because I think the MOE is, quite frankly, overwhelmed." Some voices within the MOE indicate that the preponderant focus by CPs on basic education in the past decade has seen the deterioration of other sub-sectors.

USAID become involved in the country's education sector in the late 1990s with interventions supporting the inclusion into the education sector of Zambia's most disadvantaged groups and strengthening MOE policy and planning and EMIS. USAID engagement has evolved to provide targeted support to policy development and capacity building support on community schools and decentralization. USAID acknowledged that the increased donor coordination in the SWAp was beneficial, if time consuming, but expressed significant concern on the forward movement on decentralization.

USAID's approach to supporting the education program through project funding illustrates some of the challenges and choices faced by cooperating partners in Zambia. USAID project activities support objectives outlined in the BESSIP, MOESP and the FNDP, but are still unpopular with other cooperating partners who prefer pooled funding. Project support allows USAID more control over the successful completion of activities that directly reach target beneficiaries with meaningful educational services as well and support home office reporting requirements. The activities, such as those supporting IRI and SHN can be completed in concert with MOE initiatives and departments, but may not necessarily be managed through them. In doing so, these activities

help an overextended MOE to meet sector goals. Working through the MOE HQ increases the time and uncertainty in meeting expected outcomes, and in some cases appears an inappropriate or ineffective point of entry into a complex system. However, close working relationships between CP and MOE counterparts supported the process of policy development and implementation of new approaches that supports the strengthening of MOE capacities and clarity of MOE guidance leading change in the system.

EXTERNAL FORCES AND GLOBAL TRENDS

International forces driving Zambia's reform agenda during the early 1990s included support for EFA, privatization, cost-sharing, and community schools. EFA remained on the agenda through the reform period and likely influenced Levy Mwanawasa's inclusion of the Free Basic Education reform in his 2002 campaign platform. Toward the mid-1990s—international organizations increasingly supported decentralization and the development of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAps). In the later part of the 1990s, nascent support for assessing quality and supporting literacy through mother tongue instruction gained traction, manifested in the National Assessment of Standards and the Primary Reading Program and the Breakthrough to Literacy models. Initiatives supporting increased harmonization, a greater focus on direct budget support and the initiation of EFA-Fast Track Initiative funding helped shape the landscape of reform activities in the early and mid-2000s. Structural adjustment policies and external debt are explained in a previous section.

CONCLUSION

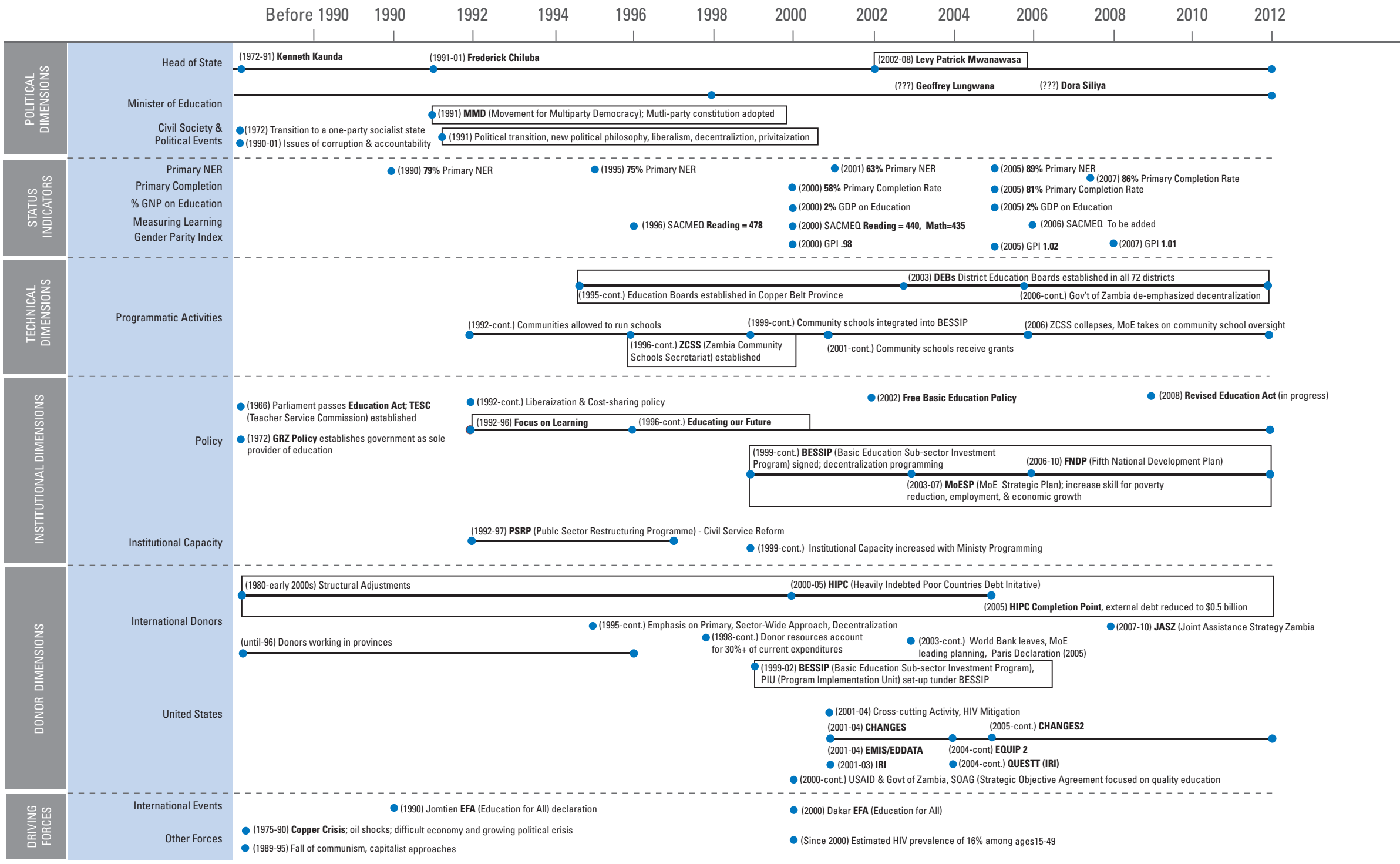
The Zambian experience offers an example of gradual strengthening and increasing functionality of a system within the constraining context of highly centralized human resource and management policies and limited resources. The continuity provided by *Educating Our Future* and the SWAp process of joint planning and implementation created structures and processes supporting the partnership and coordinated work by both the government and multiple donors.

Throughout the reform period, donor activities extended the reach of the system, but at times did so in undermined rather than strengthened system capacity development. Implementation of too many activities in the early 2000s diluted MOE focus—the system simply did not have the resources or capacity to scale-up all promising pilots. But the processes and initiatives that subsequently

received longstanding support from multiple system actors—including donors—have been integrated into the system DNA and become elements that are not a 'part of the system', but rather elements that help define the system. One of the most significant reforms of the period, community schools, while drawing on the National Educational Policy for guidance, achieved both continuity and expansion through strong grassroots support that offset initial neglect from the Ministry. With ongoing support from donors, and continued engagement of the MOE on Community School policy issues—sector support to community schools came to be seen as an important as a way to achieve National Education Policy goals.

ZAMBIA TIMELINE

Zambia Time Line



3 Summary Findings and Conclusions

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FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the key findings across the five case studies, followed by conclusions and the implications for donor policy and programming:

1. The reform agendas and strategies in the five countries over this period have been similar, reflecting both direct and indirect impact of the international agenda.

While the specific impetus and agenda for education reform in each of the five countries derived from unique historical and cultural forces, there was a high degree of similarity in both goals and strategies. Some of the common areas of focus, such as expanding access and increasing focus on girls' education, were the product of explicit international dialogue and initiatives (e.g., EFA). This not surprising, given the fact that the study period coincided with the EFA era and the subsequent participation of all of the countries in international EFA agreements. In addition, many of the initiatives and program activities are common to the operations of all education systems—curriculum, materials, teacher education, and infrastructure.

It is noteworthy that the five countries shared similar strategies for achieving the goals, in particular their focus on community participation, decentralization, and school-based management as well as standards, testing, and accountability for student outcomes. Though each of the countries came to these strategies from different starting points and for somewhat different reasons, all were nevertheless influenced by the dominant ideas and trends in the donor community. In some cases the strategies chosen reflected explicit conditions of projects and donor encouragement, while in other cases the chosen strategies simply reflected awareness of—and engagement with—a consensus dialogue within the international education reform community.

Common strategies did not result in identical process, or outcomes. Forces external to education, such as politics and institutional capacity, heavily influenced each country's experience. The extent to which the reform strategies were seen as a priority and 'owned' by ministers, educators, school administrators and teachers, and civil society also shaped process and outcomes. These reform stories demonstrate that when each of the countries implemented decentralization, for example, each used strategies in ways that were responsive to local conditions and dynamics—including politics, institutions, leadership and cultural patterns—that affected how strategies were chosen and introduced, and how donor assistance was implemented.

In addition to an EFA-inspired emphasis on expanding access and equity, most of the country programs were explicitly concerned with the quality of education and learning outcomes. Despite a current narrative that the focus on EFA has distorted investment toward access at the expense of quality, our study finds that neither the national plans and agendas themselves nor the perspectives of former ministers support such a view. Instead, a commitment to focus on quality improvement is found in both the national rhetoric about education, and in major investments in such activities as curriculum reform, teacher development, and student assessment. While the eventual effectiveness of some of these quality reforms can be criticized for their design or implementation, the fact of the initiatives themselves and the specific activities supporting them reflect an implicit national concern about quality and outcomes, and the intention that investment result in quality improvement.

2. All of the countries studied have sought to implement significant reforms. Some of the countries have had substantial success in implementing nationwide reforms and building national capacity. Some programs have been scaled up, modified and improved, and had measurable results.
Education reform efforts in the target countries have achieved some significant advances in various dimensions of system development over the past 18 years. The breadth of capacity, depth of impact, and speed and trajectory of the reform process has differed considerably among countries. However, progress is evident in many dimensions, including system outcomes such as improved access and equity, learning outcomes in some cases, institutional capacity, and the maturity of the management and governance of the education system.

Education system reform is a continuing process; each stage building on not only prior technical advances but also on an institutional and political base. None of the countries has "completed" the reforms, because improvement of the system is an on-going challenge. None of the countries has raised the quality of education to acceptable levels. However, all of the countries studied have made progress toward better education for the population. Many aspects of the foundations of institutional framework, capacity, leadership, technical solutions, and management systems are evident in each country.

Egypt's education initiatives in the 1990s were directed toward access and equity issues, and were successful in improving these core measures of performance. The substantive policy reforms stalled through much of the decade of the 1990s due, in part, to political unrest, but have taken off with increasing momentum since 2001, and particularly since 2005. Improved stability helped, as did coming to terms at this time with the needs

and demands of the Muslim communities. Important policy changes, a comprehensive national strategy, strong leadership, and active involvement established an important base for reform within the country's seven governorates. Pilot programs have provided evidence that internationally supported efforts can help build the individual and institutional capacity needed to implement decentralization and community participation—reforms that, in 2009, were still at the early stages both at the school level and at scale.

El Salvador has progressed from the devastation and fragmentation of civil war to a country with a remarkably stable national consensus on education, strong country leadership, and coherent, comprehensive long-term strategies and plans. Over the past 18 years, El Salvador has systematically put into place the policy and system infrastructure and institutional capacity needed for continuing quality improvement—with the result that student learning outcomes are steadily improving. As well as demonstrating effective and creative uses of information for decision-making, El Salvador has contributed internationally recognized and duplicated models for school and community-based management. As one of the foremost examples of country-led development in education, El Salvador provides a model of the value of a mature and balanced partnership with donors. With the 2009 elections having brought the opposition political party into power, the depth and strength of consensus as a strategy for sustainable reform will be put to the test.

Namibia has successfully managed 18 years of progress to create a functioning education system out of the under-resourced and racially discriminatory system inherited at the time of the country's independence from South Africa in 1990. Namibian education reform has benefited from consistent national leadership while being influenced strongly by the experience of school, district, and regional initiatives and leadership. Many innovations are being institutionalized on a national scale, such as participatory school improvement planning, school self-assessment, adaptive circuit support services, on-site teacher professional development, and achievement testing linked to professional development. These reforms were initiated and implemented in the historically disadvantaged Northern regions where the majority of the population lives, and have resulted in the best improvements in learning outcomes in the country.

In **Nicaragua**, divisions from the civil conflict in the 1980s have continued to influence the policies and practice of education reform. Without the consistency of strong educational leadership and a common national vision, Nicaragua's progress is sporadic and subject to dramatic changes in direction

from political changes. After 15 years of nation-wide implementation, the internationally known, though controversial, Autonomous School model was eliminated with the election of the opposition political party, which is based on the former revolutionary front that governed the country from 1979 to 1990. At the same time, however, successive governments and ministers have continuously supported the demonstrably effective Active School reforms in rural multi-grade schools. It not only survived the political transition, but also has been adopted as national policy for being taken to scale, growing from a small project intervention in 40 schools to serving over 48 percent of the primary school students in more than 3,000 schools.

By 1990, after 15 years of economic stagnation and political crisis, the **Zambian** education system was in a state of near collapse. The 1991 transition to a multi-party democracy led to the passage of the National Education Policy in 1996 and ushered in fundamental shifts in MOE policy. Changes in the legal framework allowed communities to operate schools and District Education Boards (DEBs) to be established. Intensive donor engagement supported Zambia's transition to a SWAp, bringing along the development of increasingly systemic management, planning, and monitoring activities. In the past 15 years, the education system has supported the enrollment of an additional one million primary school children, a new regular standards testing regime, the greater inclusion of decentralized actors into education planning and service delivery, and the creation of a culture of planning and coordination between the MOE and the donor community.

3. Implementing education system reform takes significant time, and is often achieved through incremental changes.

The case studies provide insights into the time required to achieve fundamental changes in an education system from the policy level, through institutional changes, and into the classrooms. The case studies show that education systems change incrementally over time rather than through a "big bang." Some countries have had periods of relatively intense reform efforts, particularly in terms of changes in policies, procedures, or capacity development. Such forward movements, however, are often followed by an 'implementation dip' or slowdown. Changes in policy and enabling legislation can sometimes be accomplished relatively quickly under the right circumstances, but seldom have a direct or immediate impact on practice. Financial changes, such as abolishing school fees, have the most direct impact to increase school attendance, at least in the short run, but can be disruptive to other goals of completion and quality. Policy changes are critical and valuable to the extent that they can affect the incentive systems—the 'rules of the game'—that influence behavior

over the long term. However, most education policy change has little direct or immediate impact on school quality, and some has unanticipated—and sometimes negative—outcomes as other parts of the system adapt to the new policy.

Reforms are sometimes effected by sweeping changes legislated virtually overnight, as was the case in establishing Autonomous Schools in Nicaragua. Though this effort served as a catalyst to change some dynamics within the system, effective implementation and management of the new system was a work in progress for 15 years, until the Ortega-led government abruptly reversed the policy in 2005. This policy change was a reaction to perceived distortions and inequities in the system attributed to the policy, as well as to ideological differences. Other policy changes, such as those in Egypt in 2006-2008, were the result of years of developing agreement and will require many more years of intense work to enable implementation.

Ultimately, education system reform is a human endeavor that works on a retail rather than wholesale level; change occurs on a district-by-district, school-by-school and teacher-by-teacher basis. Teachers and principals, as a group, do not change fundamental behaviors and mental models on the basis of a new regulation or training course. Rather, individuals change as they learn and internalize new ways of working, and gain confidence in their abilities and in the 'rightness' of the changes. Consistent, regular support and reinforcement are required to enable this kind of change. Careful documentation of reform efforts and outcomes is indispensable for discerning longer-term trends, and for identifying opportunities for intervention.

In response to the question "How long does education reform take?" the most appropriate answer is: "That is the wrong question." Reforms are by their nature iterative and incremental, and require deep learning and capacity on a district-by-district and school-by-school basis to become effective. Because implementation of substantive changes at the school level requires ownership and capacity in a critical mass of school administrators, supervisors, teachers, and parents, reforms have long lag times from inception and implementation to measurable effectiveness.

In the case study countries, the timeframe needed for reforms were as follows:
Egypt: 15 years and counting In Egypt, it is difficult to know when to start counting reform dates. The initiatives in the 1990s—UNICEF Community Schools, USAID New Schools, and various decentralization initiatives—laid the groundwork for future work, and provided a model of successful school-

based management, but were limited to pilot projects. From the initiation of the Alexandria Pilot in 2002, the momentum built to limited decentralization authority in seven governorates and approval of the financial decentralization pilot in 2009. However, the decentralization and community participation reforms have been implemented only partially, and only in select areas to date, mainly in locales where international organization support is being provided.

El Salvador: 18 years and counting EDUCO needed seven years to reach 40 percent of the country in providing improved access, and another five years to implement school management councils in non-EDUCO schools, with appropriate financial transfers. Despite universal implementation of this school-based management model, many of the school management tools (PEA, PEI, and RQT) needed to improve school effectiveness were not developed and implemented until 2001, and was still only fully implemented in a limited number of schools by 2008.

Namibia: 14 years and counting The Learner Centered Education and Continuous Assessment policies were introduced in 1994, and programs have sought to fully operationalize them in all schools since that time. It took approximately five years to introduce, modify, and implement the 10-year School Improvement Program and eight-year School Self Assessment in the Northern regions. Expansion to the rest of the country has been in progress for four years at this writing, going through an implementation dip in the process of scaling up.

Nicaragua: 15 years and counting The Active School models began as project initiatives in 40 model schools in 1994. By 2009, the model was being implemented (at various degrees of effectiveness) in more than 3,000 schools, covering almost half of the students in the country. The approach had been adopted as a national policy by the MOE and, in 2009, was in the process of being scaled up to the national level.

Zambia: 15 years and counting Cost-sharing and liberalization policies implemented in the early 1990s laid the foundation for community school growth and increased capacity, while contributing to stagnating enrollment in government primary schools. Implementation of a decentralization strategy in Zambia has been a stop-and-go process for the past 15 years. Since 2003, District Boards have supported the growth of community schools. In 2006, even as a presidential declaration formally halted decentralization, the MOE became more deeply engaged in supporting system inclusion of community schools, with critical support from its decentralized offices.

4. Technical validity, policies, capacity, and adequate resources to address funding gaps are necessary but not sufficient conditions to enable real change. Equally critical are political will and institutional commitment, which may rest on the intangible factors of relationships, trust, and credibility.

In the case study countries, the primary drivers or constraints to system reforms were political and institutional. As a constraint, real progress on governance and management reforms in **Egypt** was not possible until large scale political issues had been addressed (a notable one being the eventual truce between the government and radical Islamists) and opportunities created for reform leadership could be exerted. In **Zambia**, critically needed changes supporting decentralization and community schools in the 1996 Education Act were not addressed until five years after their articulation in the National Education Policy. At the time of this writing, a revised education act is with the Zambian Parliament, even as policy changes continue to be implemented at Ministry HQ and decentralized levels. As a driver, the strong political power and leadership of key ministers of education in **El Salvador** and **Nicaragua** have powerfully influenced how the reform agenda is pursued.

The obvious value of leadership in driving reform easily tends to move observers toward a 'great man' view that valorizes the role of charismatic and politically powerful leaders. Certainly, in the case studies there are sufficient examples of strong leaders enabling reforms to encourage such a view. **Egypt's** proliferation of policy reforms came about with the appointment of a new MOE in 2005, and the policies of Humberto Belli dominated **Nicaraguan** education for a decade after he left office. **El Salvador**'s long string of qualified, effective Ministers and deputy ministers was an undeniable factor in the country's stability and progress, and **Namibia**'s strong leadership that began with Nahas Angula set the stage for years of continuous progress. Of course, it is also true that individual support requires political and social conditions to be favorable to specific reforms. In **Egypt**, for example, the same Minister who limited decentralization reforms throughout the 1990s approved the decentralization pilot in Alexandria and the delegation to the six other governorates once the radical Islamist threat and other issues had been addressed. As the case studies demonstrate, effective and committed leaders make good reform more likely than do weak leaders.

But a reliance on individual leaders to effect reforms may be thwarted by the ordinary fact that commitment, charisma, and championship of reforms are not traits inherent to positions, and successors will not inevitably have the same desirable qualities as their predecessors. People change jobs and roles, they go away entirely, and permanent leadership is not possible even if it were desirable. Fortunately, another lesson of the case studies is that political will

is not necessarily limited to individual characters, and program interventions can sometimes enhance other strengths within particular systems. The political leadership that maintained the reforms in **El Salvador** for 20 years was not solely due to the individual ministers, but also reflected the group dynamics of the civil society leaders involved in the sector assessments and other consensus-building activities. The commitment to building national consensus on education, combined with the active social marketing of the reforms, created a dynamic that was not dependent on the lifetime involvement of one individual.

In **Nicaragua** and **Namibia**, one observes a bottom-up effort to create broad-based political acceptance that led to national policy change. While it was important in both countries that respective school-based management programs had support from senior leaders, the policy changes were enabled by the development of a critical mass of advocates in the regions, districts, and schools, along with evidence of improved outcomes. This was particularly clear in **Nicaragua**, where a powerful and charismatic Sandinista MOE entered office expecting to terminate the previous regime's programs. However, because of the advocacy of communities, principals and teachers, and supervisors around the country, the Active School approach not only survived the transition, but also was adopted as national policy.

The process of supporting reforms was an important factor in all of these countries. In **Namibia,** the existence of the Steering Committee along with the close working relationship with USAID, were important factors in developing trust and the ownership of the initiatives. Combined with the highly participatory professional reflection activities in the Northern regions, both in schools and in the circuits, the reforms gained deep ownership at both the national and local levels. The reforms in **El Salvador** were influenced not only by ministry and civil society leaders, but also by a strong and credible source of information and data from EMIS systems and evaluations. The reform agenda in **Egypt** was strengthened by significant amounts of information and data, and high profile events (notably, a high-profile technical mission and a decentralization conference) that engaged the education sector and mobilized support. Also important were development of capacity, and commitment of sub-national ministry personnel and other stakeholders.

5. Contextual forces outside of the national education sector can impact the potential for reform, creating opportunities for and constraints on change. The driving forces for system change may be external or domestic, but can be critical to enabling change. One of the core elements of system reform is the idea of 'creating space' in the system; that is, finding opportunities to

introduce ideas and practices for change in a receptive environment. The case studies illustrate a diverse set of influences and driving forces that can either encourage or block change. In all of the countries, the influence of international agreements, such as the Education for All declarations in 1990 and 2000, and donor emphasis on such issues as universal primary education, girls' education, community participation, and decentralization, had an important if not definitive impact. Even more than international consensus and external forces, national events and politics dominated the reform process in all of the countries, and created or blocked opportunities to introduce and sustain changes.

Independence in Namibia in 1990 created both the space and the incentive for major reforms, within the context and ethos of nation building. Attaining independence and forming a new government elicited a narrative around national identity, and the resulting commitment to key principles heavily influenced choices in the education system. Reforms and donor programs that were aligned with these principles were most likely to gain traction. Needless to say, this was not a smooth process, with hard political battles over most of the key policy issues between SWAPO leaders, members of the former white leadership, and different regional and ethnic groups.

The 1992 Peace Accords that marked the end of the civil war in El Salvador created opportunity and stimulus for rebuilding the education system, with critical forthcoming donor support. The Salvadoran education leadership used this space to engage communities, businesses, unions, and political rivals to develop a consensus on the direction and importance of education. This underlying political strategy has been a consistent theme of educational governance in El Salvador for more than 15 years.

Elections in 1990 initiated recovery from civil conflict in Nicaragua, which also resulted in donor support and reform initiatives. But unlike the situation El Salvador, many Nicaraguan education initiatives were specifically designed to counterbalance differing ideologies, with the result causing the education system to be a contested terrain.

Transition to multi-party democracy in **Zambia** in 1990 represented a repudiation of an old system that was perceived to have failed politically and economically. The transition created space for the implementation of new policies, including measures that supported liberalization, cost-sharing, decentralization, and community participation. During the reform period, Zambia's debt burden and the influence of significant donor resource contribution to the education

sector limited the agenda-setting mandate of the MOE. The more recent development of MOE capacity and SWAp structures have increased the power and mandate of the MOE within the GRZ system (e.g. MOE's ability to argue for budget lines and priorities with the Cabinet and the Ministry of Finance) and the confidence of donor partners to program resources through MOE system and align activities with MOE investment plans.

In **Egypt**, domestic political issues and concerns about radical Islamists effectively stalled progress in implementing decentralization and community participation throughout the 1990s. The opening for new initiatives came with the signing of a truce and the decision to open elections to other political parties, which motivated the National Democratic Party and the government to engage local communities in education and other sectors. Increasing domestic unhappiness with education quality and outcomes intensified the pressure for reform to provide Egyptian families and youth with better educational opportunities.

6. Effective use of information, through evaluation, assessment, and EMIS systems, can be a powerful enabler of change.

Development of greatly improved management information systems has been a hallmark of this period. In all countries studied, EMIS data is available and utilized for decision-making. The information environment in Zambia, Namibia, Nicaragua, and El Salvador is relatively robust, and Egypt has placed considerable emphasis on addressing this issue in recent years. Information for decision making is available not only through the administrative data, but also from complementary sources such as the school self-assessment system in Egypt and Namibia, the National Education Accounts in El Salvador, and various national and international student assessment systems.

As well as facilitating a broader enabling political environment, information and evaluation can influence immediate policy decisions. Some examples useful in understanding the wide-ranging impact of information are found in **El Salvador**'s experience: World Bank evaluations and approval of EDUCO had an important impact on the credibility and perception of the MOE, and reinforced national political support for the reforms. More recently, information from El Salvador's National Education Accounts highlighted the harmful effect of disproportionate parental financial contribution at the secondary level, resulting in a major policy change that eliminated school fees at that level. In fact, information and empirical assessment has been central to the MINED process of consultations, participatory assessment, transparency about progress, and goal setting.

In **Namibia**, triangulated information from school self-assessment, classroom observations, and student assessment informs teacher practice, professional development planning, and policy. In **Egypt**, standards-based assessments of management practices and other aspects of schooling as well research findings on student learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving provide immediately relevant measures of both impact and issues in implementing the reforms. Increased use and confidence in EMIS systems in **Zambia** have helped policy makers recognize the impact of community school growth and have led to increased recognition and support of community schools.

These examples importantly highlight the fact that the use of information is really about enabling the system—and the people who work in or with it—to learn, adapt, and respond to the reality on the ground. Information that is used effectively in the context of a communications strategy can have a catalytic effect on system change as well as simply providing data.

7. Sustainability of specific activities is less important than continuity and sustained system improvement.

Sustainability of particular interventions, policies, or practices is one of the fundamental concepts of development. In the case of education, the concept may be problematic: sustainability is primarily a project concept rather than a systems concept. Sustainability is typically thought of as donor organizations passing to the government responsibility for financing and implementing project interventions.

In place of such an inherently donor-centric approach, a systems perspective considers sustainability over the long term, during which education innovations and interventions may be usefully continued, modified, or dropped as the context changes, while commitment and focus on improving the quality of education remain constants.

Establishment of a mature and effective education structure that can implement, evaluate, and adapt as needed is the foundation of genuine sustainability. This structural and institutional improvement is essential, and requires the incorporation of two other elements: continuity and survivability.

Continuity of people, procedures, policies, and systems is important to sustained improvement in education quality. It is difficult for any organization to implement fundamental reforms with significant and frequent turnover at the leadership and technical levels. Of course, change in leadership, personal and political agendas, and even ideology is an inherent feature of democracy,

and every new government seeks its own successful programs and reforms. Change in educational leadership and priorities can also occur on a distressingly frequent basis in all systems of government as ministers, vice ministers, and directors general are shuffled for reasons often unrelated to reforms.

This organic process encourages a proliferating series of new programs rather than solidifying and deepening existing initiatives. Nor are donors immune from interruptions in continuity. Leadership turnover in USAID missions—Mission Directors and Contacting Officer's Technical Representatives—and changes in U.S. administrations can dramatically change the agenda. This structural fact is important to recognize: as we have noted, the lifespan necessary for a significant reform to take hold nationally is at least a decade if not longer—a period that would encompass at least two administrations in most democracies, including the United States, and up to five or more changes in USAID project and mission leadership.

Because continuity of key individuals in both governments and donors is unavoidably limited, sustained development also requires the element of ***survivability***, which can be defined as a strategies designed to survive changes in government or ministry leadership and changes in donor agendas. All of the study countries experienced such change with varying results, and the survival of the reforms often depends on the extent to which the reform process encouraged broad-based support for the reform and created a solid foundation. The nature of a survivable foundation differed by country, but in each case went beyond Ministry support to include other political groups, civil society, municipalities, schools and teachers, as well as parents and communities.

El Salvador had four governments and as many Ministers of Education during the study period, most of which had prior roles in earlier governments, thus providing continuity at the leadership, management, and operational levels. A few programs were continued throughout the period, but more importantly new programs were built on the principles and lessons of prior programs. The structures that enabled continuity were: a political dialogue that emphasized core principles and shared goals rather than adherence to specific programs; two systematically reviewed and adapted long-term plans; and the continuity of a core team of leaders and technicians for much of the period.

Since 1990, **Namibia** has had two governments and three Ministers of Education (MOEs) during which continuity at the MOE, regional, and circuit levels resulted in capacity development, understanding of the nuances of the reforms,

and building deep ownership. Even within this relatively stable environment, personnel changes in key MOE departments, regional offices, and donor agencies expose the system to different agendas and philosophies. In Namibia, the potential negative impact of such changes was contained through governance structures, such as the Steering Committee established for the USAID BES 1, 2 and 3 projects, which combined MOE, regional leadership, and USAID representatives. In this type of structure, even dramatic leadership changes in one or more offices are balanced by continuity in the rest of the committee.

Egypt has experienced considerable continuity in leadership, with one minister of education holding office for 13 years and one president throughout the study period. This continuity allowed for longer-term commitments and engagement in, if nothing else, rhetorical reform—although it has also limited the flow of new ideas and interventions found in a less static political environment. Egypt's political continuity and a degree of continuity in USAID/Egypt's personnel facilitated the development of good working relationships, and seem to have contributed to facilitating the improved educational progress that one observed after the turn of the century.

In **Zambia**, Educating Our Future and the SWAp process have provided continuity by means of their joint planning and implementation structure, intended to balance the government and donor forces. However, one of the most significant reforms of the period—community schools—drew on the National Education Policy and achieved both continuity and expansion through strong grassroots support and more than a decade of involvement by a constellation of donors, offsetting the relative neglect of this issue from the MOE. These reforms gained broad support and became more important as a way to achieve EFA-specified access goals.

Nicaragua has had four governments, six ministers of education, and countless vice-ministers and director generals at all levels. In 2006, the Sandinista party regained national leadership for the first time since 1990, bringing a new team and agenda. Through consistent donor support and recognition of the initiatives, and ultimately through strong school, district, and parent support, there was continuity in one major reform, the Active School approach. The other reform model, the Autonomous Schools, did not survive the political change despite donor support in part because little effort was made to develop consensus across political lines.

8. USAID and other donors have been important partners in enabling sustainable education reform. However, the effectiveness has often depended as much on *how* the support is provided as on *what* the technical support consists of.

The evidence from the case studies indicates that USAID programs, as well as those of other donors, have been instrumental in supporting education reform. This study did not seek to assess the specific accomplishments of individual projects in terms of achieving objectives, meeting targets for deliverables, or cost-effectiveness, but to review aid in the context of system change. It can be argued that the most lasting and significant impact of donor support is due as much to the process of engagement as to the deliverables of the projects.

Donor policy dialogue on such issues as decentralization, girls' education, and community participation are influential in setting the terms of debate in the countries. This influence flows not only from the uneven power and resource dynamics involving donors and recipients but also from effective intellectual engagement. Certainly, technical and financial support of the projects helped implement activities that would have otherwise been impossible, but the highest impact of donor contribution is not necessarily so much the tangible products as the donor's role in affecting positive system dynamics. Donor assistance can contribute to credibility in government and society, an essential element of political capital. International recognition of the specific reforms can have a powerful influence on continuity and sustainability.

Key elements for effective technical assistance are trust, continuity, reliability, and confidence. Ultimately, effective technical assistance is as much a function of effective human—and inter-organizational—relationships as it is technical expertise. These relationships are often hard to develop and easy to undermine. Donor technical and financial support for pilot and demonstration projects, and other direct provision of assistance to educational systems and schools, had a significant impact on the progress of reform when it was consistent with the policy directives, or was integrated with policy support activities.

> The consistent USAID support for developing, refining, and expanding the Active School model in **Nicaragua** was an essential factor in creating an intervention with measurable impact; developing a broad base of support and capacity at the local level; and continuing the program through numerous leadership changes in the Ministry until the conditions were right for the program to mature and thrive. Without this level of consistent donor support, this highly successful program could have disappeared, an investment lost.

USAID support for hands-on assistance in implementing SIP/SSA in **Namibian** schools, financial support for creating the advisory teacher position, and intensive facilitation of professional reflection opportunities were an essential part of the success of the program.

In **Egypt**, UNICEF support for Community Schools project, and USAID support for the New Schools was invested for years before conditions were conducive for policy engagement. Once conditions were favorable, the proven and documented success of these initiatives was an important factor in policy dialogue. Moreover, USAID's support for the Alexandria Pilot Project and for the Education Reform Program built on these models and added a stronger focus on policy dialogue and system capacity building.

Project governance structures and management procedures play a key role in developing country leadership and ownership, establishing trust, building capacity, and facilitating continuous improvement practices. Whether at the national planning level, such as a SWAp, or at project or local levels, participatory governance structures require a degree of flexibility in donor management that is sometimes antithetical to a strict focus on project performance and deliverables. The more effective projects in terms of promoting sustainable reform of the education system have been those that adapted to opportunities, and were responsive to government concerns within the context of dialogue and negotiations.

The major accomplishments of **Namibia**'s program to integrate professional development in school improvement planning, self-assessment, circuit support, and on-site training were not part of the original design.

With the arrival of a reform-minded Minister and development of a comprehensive plan, the Education Reform Program in **Egypt** was restructured to address new and unanticipated areas of support.

In **El Salvador**, the opportunities created by the Presidential Commission greatly expanded a small project activity. The ability of USAID to maintain a primary focus on objectives, rather than initially defined activities and deliverables, was essential to successful implementation.

Developing the trust needed for participatory governance requires that donor agencies and their agents recognize their lack of convening power, and acknowledge the recipients' insight into the complexity of national political and institutional issues. The *sine qua non* of genuine country ownership requires donors to cede some authority and accept that the essential donor function is to enable countries to solve their own problems.

CONCLUSIONS

This review of five countries' experience in reforming education is a slice of a much more complex reality. In the countries studied, some programs were continued for a decade or more, while others were eliminated or modified substantially at the conclusion of the original program. It would be an error to label the reforms as a success or failure on the basis of a limited, project-based notion of sustainability. More important than continuing specific interventions is the existence of a continued system response to improve education.

Positive system change and performance do not come about through efforts in any one dimension—political, institutional, or technical—but through the interactions between them. It is at the intersection of interests within these dimensions that facilitative activities such as information use, evaluation, and communication of results can have considerable leverage.

Though the countries represent a range of cultures, regions, and conditions, this review cannot provide a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of the universe of developing countries. Nonetheless, the experiences of these countries are consistent with the broader literature on reform and offer insights that may be instructive in developing realistic expectations and identifying what is important in development.

The fact that reforms play out over a considerable period of time during which the players and circumstances change has profound implications. Rather than thinking of education reform as a formula, or as a technical or engineering problem to be solved, it may be more useful to think of reform as a movie, full of plot twists and character flaws and periodic events; and managing this narrative are contending interests of producers, directors, investors.

Critiques and evaluations of education assistance showing lack of impact or questioning sustainability can be put in perspective once we understand reform as a long-term narrative. Evaluation is inevitably a snapshot—a static glimpse of a dynamic process stopped at a particular point in time. A snapshot of the reforms in these five countries at any given point in time could show misleading views: unvarnished success in one frame, dismal failure in another. Most of the reforms and events in these five countries could be judged (and have been) as grand success or dismal failure based on a snapshot taken without the benefit of context or plot—or without carefully reviewing and analyzing earlier actions and conflict. A limited frame focus on individual elements such as teacher training or pilot programs in isolation shows something quite different from the view from the long-term perspective.

Another general conclusion that can be drawn from the case studies is that, in addition to being a constant, change is also almost entirely outside of the control of most of the players. With the sole exception of the President of Egypt, not one person with the power to influence events was a constant feature in these cases, and even he could not control the events that dominated reform in his country. This observation is both commonplace and profound. Approaches to education development are most-often based on the idea of *change management*, a systems engineering term that implies introducing changes in a system in a controlled manner. Based on the case studies, one can conclude that the challenge is not change management, but rather it is *managing change* or, more complexly, engaging in and monitoring efforts to change with consistent attention to historical and contemporary political and institutional dynamics. In education, change is inevitable—change of ministers, politics, conditions, school administrators, and driving events.

This brings us to a *paradox of change*. Systems theory argues that systems are generally stable, resistant to change; multiple feedback loops return the system to its earlier equilibrium after a shock. The frustrating experience of seeing reforms fail to dramatically change classroom behavior is an illustration of this: in spite of policy and program changes, the classroom process often stays the same. Herein lies paradox: it may be that the more people change around within a system, the less the system itself can change. Since the primary lever for changing systems is people, changes in people—leadership—makes changes in systems harder. This is part of the stabilizing loop.

An observation about the process of education system reform that is directly linked to the issue above is that education reform is ultimately a deeply human process that requires changes in behavior, in attitudes, in skills, and in habits, at all levels. To reform education, parents and students, teachers and principals, supervisors and managers, directors and ministers all must adopt new behaviors and ways of thinking. The fact that these sometimes disparate interests must all be addressed in coordination often gets lost in the technical discussions of what teaching techniques are best, which curriculum most pertinent, how to test. If we accept that the most important consideration is people and their thoughts and behaviors, then a central part of the discussion becomes about process of engaging people, and the incentives and rules of the game.

Given the process of engaging people and their incentives—the rules of the game—as a way of framing the process of reforming education system, what do these countries' experience have to say in practical summary terms about the issues of introducing change, ownership, sustainability and scaling up?

Ownership

It is a central tenet of development, captured in the Paris Declaration, that countries must own the reforms if they are to be sustainable. This is usually defined as having the Ministry of Education in agreement about the programs, ideally in concert with some societal consultation. However, as we have seen in the cases, ownership at the top is not sufficient for changing behavior throughout the system; it is only the starting point. Each of the key actors in the system—the national ministry staff, regional education officers, and school staff—must also be on board with the changes that directly affect them. Perhaps the most critical point for ownership is at the level of school, classroom, and district, where the "rubber meets the road" in actions that affect student learning. In countries where the major reform is a form of decentralization, the ownership issue is even more complex because the primary decision maker—say, a MOE—is not the single starting point. In a genuine decentralized system, the actors with responsibilities at all levels need to have a voice and ownership in the changes. Although all decentralization is ultimately top-down as those with power make the decision *to* decentralize, it is not sufficient for only those at the top buy-in to the system.

Deep commitment is generally a function of individuals rather than institutions. Deep commitment and ownership are not transferred with the signed agreement from the last person in office, but must be generated anew with each new person assuming responsibilities.

The case studies clearly demonstrate the importance of ownership and leadership, and how fragile these are at an institutional level. The leadership transitions in Nicaragua showed how quickly reforms that were a driving passion and central goal of one leader could lose focus with new leadership. The **El Salvador** experience demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of consensus-driven reforms. The strengthened ownership at the school level in **Namibia** and **Nicaragua** was developed through intensive and on-going engagement at the school, district, and regional levels. These projects did not focus on skills transfer through training, but rather on capacity development through peer training and reflection, frequent district and school level engagement, and collaborative development of the program activities. This resulted in social webs of support for emerging standards of behavior and performance that absorbed and integrated new people rather than being dependent on individuals.

The experiences of developing deep ownership at both the top and school levels reflect the same lesson. In both cases, the emphasis is on the process of engagement, and the establishment of structures that reinforce and validate that engagement over time. In system terms, it creates reinforcing feedback loops.

Assistance Modality

The project modality, which has been USAID's primary support mechanism in the case study countries, also demands a fresh look. This review was not a comprehensive effort to review alternative modalities, or to attempt to compare the impact of alternative programs. It is not clear that isolating out different elements and comparing relative impact is a particularly useful exercise in reviewing systems. However, by looking at the process of reform, some insights emerge.

The experience in these cases indicates that projects can be a highly successful and effective modality for fostering conditions for reform, for creating a stimulus for reform, and most importantly for enabling a process that creates mutually reinforcing incentives for reform. None of the country experiences demonstrate an unvarnished model of effective project experience, and it is tempting to engage in counterfactual explorations of alternative strategies in each country that might have changed the reform trajectory. But asking "What if you had only done x, y, z" is not as useful an exercise as is looking at the elements and processes that did seem to make a difference.

The projects showed that they could be highly effective in supporting a genuine process of engagement and collaborative development in partnership with the MOEs and larger society. USAID is perhaps in the strongest position for developing the kind of partnerships that enable genuine policy dialogue and collaboration. However, this is neither simple nor automatic. Given the paradox of change, reliance on a given set of actors in a Ministry may not be the most effective approach from a development perspective. On the one hand, any development program *must* be responsive to and supportive of Ministry goals, because MOEs have the legal responsibility within the country for the education system, and USAID should and must work to inform the decisions related to and provide the tools for empirical-based policies without indulging in a competing agenda. But likewise, we must be careful to avoid the pitfall of a simplistic formulation of the relationship between recipients and donors: international consensus established over time may emphasize some goals that are critical to development, and yet are not central to a particular MOE strategy. Girls' education is an example of such a goal. As the case studies show, assistance can also provide the kinds of support that enable USAID and contractors should work to achieve the joint goals, which enhances its credibility and potential to accelerate reforms.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education is often the least stable institution in countries with frequent and wide-ranging staff turnover. In these cases, stability and progress are significant challenges, and developing ownership in new

actors is a never-ending process. The evidence of the case studies indicates that while individual ministers' initiatives can be vulnerable to change, a broad-based consensus and support reduces that vulnerability and supports a useful degree of stability and sustainability. USAID projects have been in a unique position to facilitate that interaction from a system perspective, engaging the Ministry as the central, but not the only, actor in the system.

It is clear from these cases that there are both advantages and limitations to using projects as vehicles for supporting sustainable reform. In many cases, these limitations are not due to the project modality itself, but rather to the nature of system change and reform. An argument sometimes made against projects is that they create an unsustainable project bubble, and project activities end abruptly when funding ends, particularly when they are involved in service delivery. Critics argue that projects are inherently unsustainable. This valid concern is often reduced to a simplistic view that misunderstands the role that projects *can* play in a systems approach.

When a pilot or school project is implemented in isolation on the assumption that successful activities will be picked up and replicated by the MOE, it is easy to see why they can fail. Implemented on a short-term, small-scale basis, they can easily disappear without a trace. However, in the context of a coordinated systems approach to development, pilot and field projects can play an invaluable role in providing visible and effective models, creating confidence in solutions, generating deep support, ownership, and capacity at the school level, and providing an input into national policy dialogue. When projects have a coherent and coordinated mechanism for communications, policy dialogue, and engagement, these efforts can have a deep effect.

In both Namibia and Nicaragua, consistent and focused support for implementing the SIP/SSA and Active Schools approaches over a period of time resulted in genuine, on-going, system reform. In Egypt, the lengthy donor support for New Schools and Community Schools provided a basis for understanding how community involvement could work, and provided political confidence that enabled and informed reforms—once the conditions were conducive to reform.

Sustainability

In the context of system reform, sustainability is more complex that simply continuing project activities or initiatives. It is one thing to initiate reforms and introduce changes at some level in the system—even if at the level of activities and schools. The important changes, however, are in people's attitudes and

behaviors, and not simply specific activities. Sustaining these changes and activities requires an alignment between the leadership and deep ownership by the people involved, supported by policies and procedures that reinforce behavior and provide incentives, and able to survive changes in leadership (at all levels) without losing the level of engagement. This requires alignment of forces at the political, institutional, and technical levels and the critical mass in each to reinforce the new behaviors and practices rather than revert to old practices.

Sustainability needs to be balanced with two other elements—change and continuous improvement. It is important to emphasize that some change is desirable. Changes in direction or policy are also appropriate and legitimate when new governments come into power, so sustainability cannot mean maintaining specific policies or priorities. In the context of the long-term case studies, it would appear that the most important focus of sustainability is not on specific project activities, but rather on developing and continuing mature and effective systems of management, decision making, and governance.

It should also be noted that although this discussion places considerable emphasis on the non-financial aspects of system reform and sustainability, the availability of adequate financial resources is a central concern. All of the reforms included some degree of continued funding beyond the previous levels, including financial support for the process itself. In Namibia and Nicaragua, the critical factors included regional workshops and conferences, as well as regular school support visits by supervisors and circuit support teams. These kinds of costs are often among the most difficult for under-resourced systems to cover, and yet are relatively easy for donors to address. The challenge for many donors is the reluctance to cover costs that are seen as operating or recurrent costs.

One other aspect of the resource issue is worth exploring. Much of the international discussion about foreign assistance, particularly in the context of EFA, focuses on the "funding gap" and alternative strategies for addressing that gap. The perspective in EQUIP2's *Education System Reform and Aid Effectiveness: the Power of Persistence* is that adequate funding is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for enabling real change—and in fact is not where the greatest challenges to reform are. The question for donor support is whether the financial shortfalls are to be addressed through on-going international donations, or whether the challenge of meeting financial goals is an inherent part of the policy dialogue process.

For example, in El Salvador, one facet of the work with the Presidential Commission was focused explicitly on how El Salvador could address its financial requirements. It was recognized that the issue of public financing mechanisms

was beyond the mandate of the Minister of Education, so the policy dialogue process engaged the Ministry of Finance, legislators, private sector, and political leaders to explore alternative strategies. This process was a good demonstration of the maturity and effectiveness of the structures and processes in El Salvador.

Scaling up

The other relevant development concept is scaling up. The experience in these countries indicates that this is one of the greatest challenges, and that it requires significant patience and persistence. Scaling up requires that all of the other elements have been met—that the interventions and policies have proven to be effective; that the changes have been introduced in sufficient depth as to have genuine ownership and leadership at all levels; and that the reforms are sustainable and survivable. When all of these conditions are in place, scaling is possible, but still not easy.

The key factors for success in the countries that have made significant progress in adopting processes and principles on a national scale have been continuity, adaptation, and time. In none of the cases are specific reforms operating at acceptable quality standards on a national scale. Many of the key reforms were not intended for scaling up. Countries such as El Salvador determined that one size does not fit all, but adapted core principles about community school management for different purposes. In Namibia, several donor-funded project innovations have been folded into national-level improvement initiatives, retaining the key elements of the original program interventions. In Nicaragua, an explicit policy decision was made to scale-up the Active Schools approach to all schools. The Zambia community schools expansion was largely an organic process rather than a policy decision. In Egypt, strategic planning was initiated on a pilot project basis in one, and then seven, governorates before becoming a national program. The National Strategic Plan not only was coordinated bi-directionally with the seven governorates' planning processes, but also facilitated strategic planning initiatives in all other governorates. In this case, a process and planning mentality was scaled-up rather than a specific intervention.

The Zambian experience offers an example of gradual strengthening and increasing functionality of a system within the constraining context of highly-centralized human resource and management policies and limited resources. Throughout the reform period, donor activities have extended the reach of the system, but at times did so in ways that did not strengthen, and sometimes undermined, system capacity development. Implementation of too many activities in the early 2000s diluted MOE focus; the system simply did not have the resources or capacity to scale-up all promising pilots. However, processes

and initiatives that have received long-standing, iterative support from multiple system actors, including donors, have integrated themselves into the system DNA—becoming elements that are not a 'part of the system' but elements that help to identify and define the system.

In both Namibia and Nicaragua, the process of deliberate and planned scaling up is instructive. The challenge is maintaining the central characteristics that enabled success at a smaller level. Both countries are facing an "implementation dip" as the nature of project support changes, and the responsibility for implementing the program moves to new players and new leaders. The challenges—political, institutional, and technical—faced in the scaling up process are substantially different than those faced in pilot implementation. What appear to be most easily lost in the scaling up are the process aspects that enabled success. In both the Namibia and Nicaragua cases, much of the deep learning and ownership at the school and district level was enabled by intensive support from technical supervisors, facilitators, or resource teachers, and reinforced with periodic conferences and workshops at the district and region level.

In the rush to scale up in a cost effective way, there is a tendency to look for a formula, instead of recognizing that the human process of developing ownership, strengthening new behaviors, and changing systems is done at a school-by-school level. The substantive reforms that affect teacher and student behavior require not simply new knowledge, but as Michael Fullan points out, 'reculturing.' The most important lessons from the study on which we report here are about the process of reculturing education systems.

Measuring Progress

An interesting insight from the case studies is that the factors and events that had the greatest impact on successful reform efforts are often invisible from the official accounts and project reports. Although process and structures are the building blocks of sustainable system reform, they are often ignored or understated in the official histories of the reforms. The milestones of progress are often either measures of education progress (such as changes in enrollment, completion, equity, or learning outcomes) or, more frequently, are activity-level accomplishments such as teachers trained, materials distributed, or reports published. In some cases, indicators such as number of policies approved seek to get at system issues, but are also problematical, as they neither judge effectiveness or implementation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR USAID POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The implications of the findings of these case studies for USAID policy and programming are expressed in this report as general guidelines. A primary finding of the case studies is that the specific context in each country will define opportunities as well as constraints—so it is not surprising that most concrete program recommendation is to preserve sufficient flexibility to allow programs to be customized to take advantage of the opportunities—and minimize the constraints—in each country.

The factors that most influenced sustainable system reform and improvement are related to *process* and *structures* and their supporting activities and inputs, such as information, evaluation, technical assistance, and analysis. These interventions deal with the human aspects of development: ownership, commitment, engagement, and the kind of deep learning that stakeholder reflection can achieve. A caution about such a list is the tendency to think of such interventions as discrete events, or parts of a menu of activities.

The single most important lesson from these case studies is that for effective and durable intervention, all project activities—service delivery, dialogue, information and analysis, training, workshops, and others—must be seen and strategized in the context of longer term goals and trends.

The case studies encourage a USAID response that, through the agency's programs, project design and implementation, exploits its particularly adept capability to:

1. Include an explicit strategy for engaging at the policy and system level, helping to establish and support the *processes* and *structures* needed for long-term development and sustainable improvement. Using the system reform framework, the context can be subject to a SWOT-type analysis that is sensitive to changing conditions and emerging opportunities.

2. Develop and foster a shared philosophy of development in USAID officers that helps to define in operational terms the role enabling development, and the implications for relationships with ministries, civil society, and other stakeholders. A good starting point for such a philosophy would be Easterly's concept of the "seeker", which captures the idea of deep learning and ownership.

3. Define partnership and strategies for what 'accompanying reform' means in each country.

4. Combine a nuanced sense of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist with the capacity to respond flexibly. Since reforms are opportunistic, each mission should have activities engaging in the high-value, long-term policy engagement activities.

5. Explore meaningful ways of measuring and reporting on systems and process support, thus calling attention to and providing incentives for donors to focus on the process aspects of development.

6. Explore ways of managing policy engagement and reform support activities, balancing accountability for program accomplishment and delivery schedules with the scheduling of process activities that require policy engagement and agreement of multiple partners.

7. Emphasize the importance of high quality technical work, concrete work products and deliverables, or any of the traditional areas of support such as training, pilot activities, materials development, curriculum reform, etc. Tangible support is an essential part of being an effective partner and for establishing the credibility and trust that enables policy dialogue.

8. Balance support to the government partner in a bilateral agreement with the needs for long-term reform.

9. Develop improved guidelines for structuring and conducting evaluations, addressing the continuum of issues from a development perspective and promoting evaluations that have a broad focus rather than a snapshot of status and deliverables.

In some of the cases studied in *Education System Reform and Aid Effectiveness: The Power of Persistence*, USAID has effectively supported policy dialogue that enables societal consultation and helps generate the political will and civil society support needed for fundamental reforms. For this kind of policy dialogue, USAID support is distinctive in being supportive of, but not limited to, the Ministry. Projects that can play an intermediary role will have both a partnership with the Ministry that engenders confidence and trust, and the independence necessary to gain the confidence of civil society actors.

Finally, the cases presented in this report provide insights about the potential for USAID projects to enable policy dialogue to foster more sustainable projects and greater survivability of reform. This is perhaps the greatest strength and comparative advantage that the USAID project modality offers.

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