The Challenge of Learning:
Improving the Quality of Basic Education
in Sub-Saharan Africa
The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Edited by

Adriaan M. Verspoor

Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
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# Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations                                                                                     ............................................ 13
Preface  
*By Mamadou Ndoye*                                                                                           ............................................ 17
Acknowledgements                                                                                               ............................................ 29

## Chapter 1. Setting the scene
*By Charlotte Sedel*                                                                                           ............................................ 31
  The challenges of Education for All .................................................................................................................. 33
    Participation in education ................................................................................................................................. 34
    Low survival rate in sixth grade ...................................................................................................................... 34
    Learning achievement ....................................................................................................................................... 35
    Disparities in education .................................................................................................................................... 36
  The social demand for a quality education ......................................................................................................... 37
  The determinants of poor quality .......................................................................................................................... 38
    Declining and poorly managed resources ......................................................................................................... 39
    Too few competent teachers ............................................................................................................................ 40
  The underperformance of education systems ....................................................................................................... 41
    Slow transition toward effective mass education models .................................................................................. 41
    The evolution of the quality concept ................................................................................................................ 43
    Low policy implementation capacity ................................................................................................................ 43
    A difficult economic environment ..................................................................................................................... 44
    Impact of HIV/AIDS on the quality of education ............................................................................................... 45
    Education in countries in conflict .................................................................................................................... 46
Objective and methodology of the discussion paper .............................................................................................. 47
  Objective of the study .......................................................................................................................................... 47
  Methodology .......................................................................................................................................................... 49
  Organization of the paper .................................................................................................................................... 51

## Chapter 2. The reality of quality improvement:
Moving toward clarity  
*By Jane Schubert*                                                                                             ............................................ 53
  Perspectives on quality ........................................................................................................................................ 53
  What is known about quality improvement? .......................................................................................................... 55
    Resourced environments .................................................................................................................................. 57
    Less fiscally resourced environments ................................................................................................................ 61
  Using the knowledge ............................................................................................................................................. 65

## Chapter 3. What is the problem of equity in quality?
*By John Oxenham*                                                                                              ............................................ 69
  Inequality and equity ........................................................................................................................................... 69
  The correlates of disadvantage ............................................................................................................................. 71
    Poverty ............................................................................................................................................................... 73
    Rural residence .................................................................................................................................................. 77
    Gender ............................................................................................................................................................. 78
  Mitigating inequity .............................................................................................................................................. 84
  Equity in resource allocation ............................................................................................................................... 86
  Equity and excellence .......................................................................................................................................... 86
Chapter 4. Emerging partnerships for quality improvement
By Jeanne Moulton ................................................................. 89
The growing scale of reforms ................................................. 89
The project approach and its shortcomings ......................... 91
The sector approach: SWAps ................................................. 93
   Principal features of SWAps ............................................. 94
   SWAps’ contribution to quality improvements ..................... 95
   Experience relevant to improving quality .......................... 96
   Successes ........................................................................... 97
   Issues .............................................................................. 98
Complementing SWAps: NGOs and poverty reduction strategies ......................... 101
   NGOs and civil society ..................................................... 101
   Poverty Reduction Strategies .......................................... 103
Conclusions ...................................................................... 105

Chapter 5. Options for a cost-effective allocation of resources
By Alain Mingat ................................................................. 107
The context of education policy regarding quality .................. 107
Organizational factors: impacts, priorities and optimum combinations .. 110
   Identifying the choices to be made .................................... 110
   The levels of quality of African education systems based on their results 112
Factors related to the organization of schooling ...................... 115
   Factors characterizing the classroom context ....................... 116
   Textbooks and pedagogical materials ............................... 126
   Impact of education policy and practice ............................ 129
Qualitative, pedagogical and management factors .................. 135
Conclusion ...................................................................... 137

Chapter 6. A relevant curriculum for quality basic
Education for All
By Martial Dembêlé and Mamadou Ndoye ......................... 139
   Introduction: relevance, a shared preoccupation .................. 139
   Conceptual clarifications and functional definitions .............. 141
Recent reforms aimed at adapting curricula in sub-Saharan Africa ........................................................................ 143
   Reforms related to the purposes of education ...................... 143
   Pedagogical reforms: from teaching strategies to learning strategies ........................................................................ 155
   Reforms related to the organization and management of classes and student numbers .......................................... 157
Assessment and review of experiences in Africa .................. 161
Conclusion ...................................................................... 164

Chapter 7. Breaking the mold: Teacher development for pedagogical renewal
By Martial Dembêlé ................................................................. 167
Visions of effective teaching practice .................................. 168
   Open-ended instruction .................................................. 169
   Structured instruction .................................................... 172
   Bringing the visions together? ......................................... 174
Teacher development for pedagogical renewal ................. 177
Teacher development: a conceptual framework .................. 178
   Reforming pre-service teacher education ......................... 181
   Continuous professional development ............................. 186
   Using alternative delivery modes to achieve results ........... 190
Concluding thoughts .......................................................... 192
Chapter 8. Improving the effectiveness of schools:
The African experience
By Martial Dembélé

Chapter 10. Managing the improvement of education
By John Oxenham

Chapter 9. Diversity within an integrated education system
By John Oxenham

Chapter 11. Monitoring performance:
Assessment and examinations
By Thomas Kellaghan and Vincent Greaney
Chapter 12. Financing quality basic education
By Bart van Uythem and Adriaan Verspoor

Introduction ................................................................. 293
The cost of EFA 2015 ...................................................... 293
A lower-bound estimate .................................................. 295
Options for managing higher-than-projected cost ........................... 301
  Reduction in salary cost .............................................. 301
  Increase target class size to 45 .................................... 302
  Increase the role of private schooling .............................. 302
  Increase external funding .......................................... 304
  Low cost options for service delivery ............................. 305
  Impact of various policy options .................................. 308
  Increasing the efficiency of resource utilization ................. 309
Partnerships for resource mobilization ................................ 311
  Equity and community financing ................................ 312
  Support to communities and schools ............................. 316
  Providing direct support to students in difficult circumstances 318
Conclusion ........................................................................ 320

Chapter 13. Towards a culture of quality:
A strategic framework
By Adriaan Verspoor .......................................................... 323
The seven pillars of quality improvement .................................. 324
  Create the opportunity to learn .................................... 325
Improve instructional practice ............................................ 327
  Manage the challenge of equity .................................... 330
  Increase school autonomy and flexibility ......................... 331
  Nurture community support ....................................... 333
  Ensure a realistic financial framework ............................ 334
  Respond to HIV/AIDS and conflict ............................... 335
A culture of quality ........................................................... 337
  Leadership in a culture of quality ................................. 338
  Prevention of failure is the starting point ....................... 338
  Benchmarking good practice ....................................... 339
  Continuous learning is key ......................................... 339
  Implementation is of the essence ................................. 340

Chapter 14. The way forward: Emerging priorities for action
By Adriaan Verspoor .......................................................... 345
National commitment to quality ........................................ 345
Setting priorities and going to scale ................................... 347
Building capacity .......................................................... 353
Strengthening partnerships ............................................. 356
Learning from practice .................................................. 358
Table 12.4 Comparison of cost per learner in non-formal education programs and two years of primary schooling .............................................................................................................. 307
Table 12.5 Cost per NFE program completer (Senegal) ................................................................................. 307
Table 12.6 Impact of different measures on expected annual EFA cost, domestic resource availability and the financial gap .......................................................................................................... 310
Table 12.7 Household monetary contribution to primary education as a percentage of household income (or expenditure) ................................................................................. 314
Table 12.8 Percentage of parents or guardians whose households have contributed materials or labor to primary schools and/or teachers within last year ................................................................................. 314
Table 12.9 Effect of incentive programs on primary unit costs for six African countries ..................... 319
Table 13.1 Enhancing learning achievement ............................................................................................. 327
Table 14.1 Stages of quality improvement ................................................................................................. 349

List of Graphs and Figures

Graph 1.1 Distribution of out of school children in the world ........................................................................... 32
Graph 1.2 Survival rates in sixth grade and gross intake rate in primary school (2000) ......................... 35
Figure 1.1 The transformation of inputs into outputs of schooling ................................................................. 48
Figure 2.1 System structure and functions ...................................................................................................... 57
Graph 5.1 Percentage of adults who can read easily according to the duration of their initial education ......................................................................................................................................... 114
Graph 5.2 Relationship between teachers’ salaries and the gross enrollment rate in 31 countries in sub-Saharan Africa .............................................................................................................. 121
Graph 5.3 Teachers’ salaries and pupil/teacher ratio in primary schools in 38 countries in sub-Saharan Africa ......................................................................................................................................... 122
Graph 5.4 PASEC test results by school, as a function of repetition rates in the class ..................................... 131
Graph 5.5 Average achievement level and unit costs in 18 African countries ................................................ 135
Graph 5.6 Pupils’ progress and unit cost (Grade 5) .......................................................................................... 136
Graph 12.1 Degree of randomness in teacher allocation to individual primary schools (%) ................... 311

List of Boxes

Box 4.1. The development of a SWAp in Uganda ......................................................................................... 99
Box 6.1. Community participation in adapting the curriculum and in teaching in Ethiopia ..................... 145
Box 6.2. Fighting drought in the Sahel through education related to the environment ................................. 147
Box 6.3. The school program on AIDS in Uganda ..................................................................................... 148
Box 6.4. Education for peace in Sierra Leone ............................................................................................... 149
Box 6.5. The primary reading program in Zambia: an example of simultaneous bilingualism .................. 152
Box 6.6. Bilingual education in Burkina Faso ............................................................................................... 153
Box 7.1. Pre-service primary teacher education reform in Guinea .............................................................. 183
Box 7.2. Uganda: Improving teacher development and management ......................................................... 185
Box 7.3. Using video technology to facilitate reflective practice and empower teachers in Northern Namibia ......................................................................................................................................... 190
Box 7.4. Upgrading primary school teachers through distance education in Mauritius ............................. 191
Box 8.1. Improving student learning in Burkina Faso ................................................................................ 197
Box 8.2. Improving student learning through English language in Zanzibar ............................................. 199
Box 8.3. Building capacity to improve student learning in Guinea .............................................................. 200
Box 8.4. Improving input provision in Benin ............................................................................................... 202
Box 8.5. Improving input provision in Uganda ............................................................................................ 203
Box 8.6. Head teacher support group in Kenya .......................................................................................... 209
Box 8.7. Community support in Uganda ..................................................................................................... 215
Box 9.1. Flexibility for nomadic and fishing communities in Nigeria ......................................................... 224
Box 9.2. An integrated approach Banma Nuara in Burkina Faso .................................................................. 225
Box 9.3. The School for Parents.................................................................230
Box 10.1. Uganda: Devolution of financial management to school management committees ..........244
Box 10.2. Tanzania: The Community Education Fund (CEF) ......................................................245
Box 10.3. Local Community Schools (ECB) in Senegal..............................................................247
Box 10.4. The program contracts (PC) in Madagascar............................................................250
Box 10.5. Senegal: The “faire-faire” strategy.............................................................................252
Box 10.6. Distribution of responsibility for education management in South Africa ....................257
Box 10.7. The use of job performance specifications in Senegal.................................................262
Box 11.1. Examination reform in Kenya.......................................................................................275
Box 11.2. School-based assessment in Swaziland.........................................................................285
Box 12.1. Public-private partnerships in Burkina Faso.................................................................303
Box 12.2. Mauritania: Community-managed classroom construction..........................................309
Box 12.3. Community financing of education..............................................................................313
Box 12.4. Targeting in the school improvement project in Uruguay..............................................318
Box 12.5. Providing support to girls in Malawi............................................................................319
Box 13.1. Peace in El Salvador......................................................................................................336
Box 14.1. 1999 ADEA Biennial Meeting, Johannesburg, South Africa .........................................346
Box 14.2. Providing resources and strengthening capacity for school improvement in poor communities in Brazil.......................................................................................................350
Box 14.3. 2001 ADEA Biennial Meeting (Arusha, Tanzania)..........................................................351
Box 14.4. 1997 ADEA Biennial Meeting (Dakar, Senegal).............................................................357
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>ACE</td>
<td>Advanced Certificate in Education</td>
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<td>Association for the Development of Education in Africa</td>
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<td>AFDB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
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<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>AKF</td>
<td>Aga Khan Foundation</td>
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<td>BETD</td>
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<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Continuous Assessment</td>
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<td>CAF/FLC</td>
<td>Functional literacy class (Classe d’alphabétisation fonctionnelle)</td>
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<td>Coordinating Center Tutors</td>
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<td>CdC</td>
<td>Job performance specifications (Cahier des charges)</td>
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<td>CEBNF</td>
<td>Non-Formal Basic Education Centers (Centre d’éducation de base non-formelle)</td>
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<td>CED</td>
<td>Centers of Education for Development</td>
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<td>CEF</td>
<td>Community Education Fund</td>
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<td>CILSS</td>
<td>Comité permanent inter-États de lutte contre la sècheresse au Sahel</td>
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<td>CISCO</td>
<td>School District (Circonscription scolaire)</td>
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<td>COBET</td>
<td>Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania</td>
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<td>Program contracts (contrats programmes)</td>
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<td>CRE</td>
<td>Education Renewal</td>
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<td>CSE</td>
<td>Community Sensitization and Empowerment</td>
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<td>CONFEMEN</td>
<td>Conférence des ministres de l’Éducation ayant le français en partage</td>
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<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency and Finnish Development Cooperation</td>
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<td>DEO</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>ECB</td>
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<td>ECD</td>
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<td>EDIL</td>
<td>Community schools (Ecoles d’initiative locale)</td>
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<td>EE</td>
<td>Environment Education</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information Systems</td>
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<td>ENI</td>
<td>École normale d’instituteurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>EQF</td>
<td>School of basic quality (École de Qualité Fondamentale)</td>
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<td>ERNESIA</td>
<td>Educational Research Network for Eastern and Southern Africa</td>
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<td>ERNWACA</td>
<td>Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa</td>
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<td>FAPE</td>
<td>African Federation of association of parent, pupils and students (Fédération africaine des associations des parents d’élèves et d’étudiants)</td>
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<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum for African Women Educationalists</td>
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<td>FDS</td>
<td>School Development Fund (Fonds de développement scolaire)</td>
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<td>FIMG</td>
<td>Pre-service Primary Teacher Training in Guinea (Formation initiale des maîtres en Guinée)</td>
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<td>Girls’ Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education</td>
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<td>Results-Based School Management</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>Gross enrollment rate</td>
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<td>GMR</td>
<td>Global Monitoring Report</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immuno-deficiency Virus</td>
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<td>Human Resources Development Project</td>
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<td>IEQ</td>
<td>Improving Educational Quality</td>
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<td>IIIEP</td>
<td>International Institute for Educational Planning</td>
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<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IMS</td>
<td>Instructional Materials Supply</td>
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<td>IMU</td>
<td>Instructional Materials Unit</td>
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<td>LCE</td>
<td>Learner-Centered Education</td>
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<td>MEBA</td>
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<td>MIE</td>
<td>Mauritius Institute of Education</td>
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<td>MLA</td>
<td>Monitoring Learning Achievement</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MONE</td>
<td>Ministry of National Education</td>
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<td>MTEF</td>
<td>Medium Term Expenditure Framework</td>
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<td>MU</td>
<td>Monetary Units</td>
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<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Partnership for Africa Development</td>
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<td>NFQE</td>
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<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>ORC</td>
<td>Opinion Research Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PADEN</td>
<td>Projet d’alphabétisation des élus et notables locaux</td>
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<td>Project in Support of the Action Plan for Literacy (Projet d’Appui au Plan d’Action Alphabétisation)</td>
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<td>Action Plan Support Project</td>
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<td>Literacy Project, Priority Women (Projet d’alphabétisation priorité femmes)</td>
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<td>PAR</td>
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<td>PAs/APEs</td>
<td>Parents/Students’ Associations</td>
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<td>PCK</td>
<td>Pedagogical Content Knowledge</td>
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<td>Primary Completion Rate</td>
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<td>School Project (Projet d’école)</td>
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<td>PERP</td>
<td>Primary Education Reform Program</td>
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<td>PFIE</td>
<td>Program of Training and Information for the Environment (Programme de formation et d’information sur l’environnement)</td>
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<td>School Small Grants Project (Projets de petites subventions aux écoles)</td>
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<td>Primary School Management</td>
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<td>PRS</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategies</td>
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<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
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<td>PSE</td>
<td>Sahel Education Program</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<td>Primary Teachers College</td>
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<td>PTE</td>
<td>Primary Teacher Education</td>
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<td>ROCARE</td>
<td>Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa (Réseau centre et ouest africain de recherche en éducation)</td>
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<td>SACMEQ</td>
<td>Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality</td>
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<td>SBM</td>
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<td>SELOP</td>
<td>Secondary English Language Orientation Project</td>
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<td>Schools of Governing Bodies</td>
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<td>Swedish International Development Agency</td>
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<td>SMC</td>
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<td>SWAp</td>
<td>Sector Wide Approach</td>
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<td>TDMS</td>
<td>Teacher Development and Management System</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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Foreword

By Mamadou Ndoye

When I was asked to assume the responsibility of writing the preface for this volume on the quality of education in Africa, I hesitated for some time, for fear that the text produced would not be equal to the privilege granted to me. What more can one say, without falling into superfluity, about this tremendous, magnificent monument of its kind?

On this occasion, of course, it is fitting to pay well-deserved homage to the ADEA’s ad hoc Working Group on the Quality of Education. The group has accomplished a tremendous feat in a relatively short time, less than two years, producing a masterpiece that would have required much more time without the exceptional pooling of expertise achieved during the course of this exercise. In addition to the core group of thematic and country coordinators, among whom Marial Dembélé deserves special mention, homage is also due to the members of the national teams who participated in the country case studies, the peer reviewers who read and commented on the authors’ texts during the drafting process, the ministers and development agency representatives who sit on the ADEA Steering Committee, and the education professionals who, before and during the Biennial Meeting, made many invaluable theoretical and practical contributions to this work. I would like to acknowledge in particular the excellent management of the scientific aspects by Adrian Vespoor, who displayed his great experience in research and development; the tireless moral and intellectual support of Birger Fredriksen and Jean Marie Byll-Cataria, who demonstrated once again their commitment to everything connected with the development of education in Africa; and the highly professional participation of my Secretariat colleagues, joined by Charlotte Sedel as assistant coordinator. May all those whom I cannot mention here and who contributed at a given time and at one level or another be assured of our satisfaction and gratitude for this invaluable contribution to the long-term task of achieving quality education for all in Africa.

In view of the misgivings expressed above, I might reasonably, and perhaps should, have gone no further. I must confess, however, that I was unable to resist the impulse to share with readers my enthusiasm for the process that
has led to this book and the main messages and prospects that I, for one, draw from it.

The title of this book indicates its purpose and approach: *The Quest for Quality: Learning from African Experiences*. This volume is more than simply the proceedings of a meeting; rather, it is the quintessence of an open, critical process of exchanges of experience, analysis and successive formulations concerning African experiences of improving the quality of basic education. The ADEA, attracted by the notion of participatory preparation for the Biennial Meeting, once again opted for the "praxis" approach in order to involve African ministries of education and their internal and external partners in collegial and critical discussions on good policy and practice, as well as in capitalizing on the lessons learned in this respect in order to inspire and undertake projects to upgrade the quality of education systems.

The ADEA Biennial Meeting, a high point in the policy dialogue for educational development in Africa, sheds light on the priority items on the agenda of educational cooperation in Africa. In this light, the subject of quality improvement, which was the theme of the 2003 Biennial Meeting, takes on its full significance. First, the ministers of education of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa chose this theme from among some ten proposals submitted to them, and their choice was confirmed by the consensus of the discussions between the ten-member Bureau of Ministers and the 22 development agencies that sit on the ADEA Steering Committee. This degree of unanimity reflects, at the least, a strongly shared concern on the part of these major stakeholders and partners for devoting increased attention and effort to this major challenge facing African education systems. Second, one of the lessons learned from the ADEA’s internal work on EFA is that it can be achieved only if success in broadening access is combined with success in improving quality. Focusing on access with no regard for quality would be a huge waste of resources for no significant gains in terms of learning outcomes. The opposite would be no better: focusing on quality without ensuring universal access would create an elitist and inequitable education system, with the most likely outcome being the replication and strengthening of the unacceptable inequalities that exist today. In either case, it would be illusory to hope to achieve education for all.

Third, analysis of the EFA movement launched in 1990 at Jomtien reveals that the African countries which have recorded noteworthy progress in increasing enrollments have given priority to increasing access, often to the detriment of quality. The recent review assessment by the “Dakar+5” seminar shows that
although nine out of every ten African children now enter primary school, only 60% of those who enter complete their primary schooling, and of these, some 50% do not master the basic skills. Any business showing results like these would go bankrupt and close its doors. Although African schools obviously cannot be closed, they are in urgent need of reform to improve their performance.

The problem of identifying what changes should be undertaken turns on the following modal question: how can the quality of education be improved in the African context? This question is a matter of concern to all stakeholders and partners of the school African: governments, education authorities, teachers, parents, communities, NGOs, universities, research institutes and so forth. This is why the exercise that led to the publication of this book sought their extensive involvement in formulating responses. Once the theme was selected, all African education ministers, education professionals and partners were invited to identify, in their respective contexts, the policies, strategies, practices and experiences aimed at improving educational quality that had proved effective and/or promising. This stage, in which the principal stakeholders engaged in critical evaluation of their own actions, enabled them to select and screen the case studies, classified by key field: teachers’ professional development and revision of teaching methods, implementation of reforms at the school and classroom level, decentralization and diversification of delivery of education programs, adaptation of curricula and the use of African languages as languages of instruction. What could we learn from the experiences identified in the various African countries? To answer this question, the stakeholders concerned joined forces with academics to form national teams to analyze and document these experiences, with support from international experts in the key fields listed above, who played the role of thematic coordinators. This wide-ranging, detailed analytical work proved to be a process of self-learning (learning from one’s own actions) and social learning (learning with others and collectively). At the same time, it helped to instill in stakeholders a culture of evaluation and self-assessment that provide insight on which conditions and factors are conducive to the success of policies and strategies to improve educational quality, while broadening their vision of the subject through new perspectives as well as enhancing their capacities through new methodological approaches and operational tools. The lessons learned at this level are all relevant in the context where they were produced, and can thus be used to
deepen and broaden both thinking and action in favor of educational quality, as well as to develop local capacity.

The second stage of the process was to compare the lessons learned from the experiences in different countries, as documented by the case studies. Three major lessons stand out. First, documentation is crucial to the exchange of experiences and inter-learning between countries, because it ensures that these experiences are communicable. Second, comparative analysis of experiences is particularly instructive because it allows all protagonists to broaden their points of view, to gain some perspective on the usual patterns of thought and action in a given context and become receptive to other approaches to quality – and this leaves the door wide open to innovation. Third, the syntheses produced on this comparative basis reveal not only the similarities and differences within African contexts, but also offer outward perspectives on other developing-region contexts, or even on international experience. With regard to the last point, the contribution of the thematic coordinators and supporting papers has helped to put African experiences in international perspective, the aim being to assess the advantages and value of the lessons learned through the country case studies in the light of the all current knowledge of the subjects addressed. The harvest of this process is impressive: twenty-two country case studies, three reviews on the experiences of development agencies, fifteen supporting papers and four thematic syntheses. All this analysis and knowledge drawn from work in the field was what fuelled the policy dialogue during the four days of open, critical and constructive discussions at the Biennial Meeting. And this book reflects all of its pithiness and substance. When added to the expected changes in the conceptions and practices of the stakeholders actually engaged in the quality improvement process, these results testify once again to the fecundity of the “praxis” approach adopted by the ADEA to contribute to the improvement of educational quality in Africa.

How should the findings be interpreted, and what are the main messages that emerge on how to improve the quality of education in Africa?

Considering the complexity of the approach, the right way to read this book cannot be linear. Combining diversity and integration, theory and practice, it embodies a spiral process that requires back-and-forth movement, the fostering of horizontal and longitudinal relationships, and dialectical syntheses. After following this spiral path, I draw from this book the following major
messages for improving the quality of education in Africa:

- adopting a flexible, dynamic conception of educational quality paves the way for adaptation in time and space;
- focusing on the basic objectives of reform provides leverage for system-wide impact;
- undertaking the needed reforms requires that we know, on the basis of rigorous analysis, which stage we have reached in the quality improvement process and what significant problems will need to be solved in priority in this stage;
- using the strategic framework for quality improvement not as a book of recipes or dogmas, but rather as a guide to action, makes it possible to learn from experience and avoid repeating mistakes or reinventing the wheel.

**Adopting a flexible and dynamic conception of quality**

The concept of quality takes on different meanings in space and time, and even between different opinions in a single space-time context. Some have not hesitated to compare quality to beauty, in order to point up the relative nature of the concept. How can it be defined? While this is not an easy question to answer, there is no lack of characteristics and aspects connected with or constituting quality to pass in review: children ready to learn, competent teachers, active learning methods, a relevant and coherent curriculum, appropriate languages of instruction, suitable teaching and learning materials, a valid system for evaluating and monitoring progress, sufficient learning time, a school leadership having a catalytic effect, effective schools, community support, a systemic environment conducive to learning and so on. While the different conceptions of quality can focus on one or another of these aspects, educational quality must still be measured primarily in terms of learning outcomes. What do pupils learn? Do they learn it well or poorly? It is in these essential questions that the quality of education resides. In basic education, the answers to these questions have to do first and foremost with basic skills or the acquisition of tools for learning – how to read, write, calculate, solve problems and communicate.

In the past, success at this level was synonymous with quality, but today this is considered insufficient, as questions about the relevance, utility and utilization of what is learned are growing ever more insistent and important. What is the purpose of school-based learning? A qualitative transformation in the cognitive structure of the learner, the realization of personal potential, autonomy and the ability to adapt to change, critical thinking, democratic citizenship,
the ability to take initiative, respect for and conservation of the environment, combating AIDS and other diseases, effective participation in the improvement of the general welfare, a spirit of tolerance and peace, scientific and technological culture, the fight against poverty and for sustainable development, or any other purpose, be it cultural, economic, social or simply human. This means that the concept of quality cannot be indifferent to relevance, which itself changes with the context and the nature of demand at the local, national, regional and international levels. Beyond that, even the impact of quality is called into question, in terms of rate of return or profitability, at both the personal and social levels.

Furthermore, in the past, the quality of schools and classes was often reflected in the production of an elite, consisting of the best pupils combined with the best from other schools and classes. What we learn here is that quality loses value when it is not equitably shared. A school of good quality is a school that ensures the success, if not of all, then of the greatest number. This requires that special attention be given to the neediest: the poor, the disabled and girls. To take account of the initial state of inequality, approaches need to be both diversified and compensatory, so that quality is delivered to all, with due regard for different situations and for meeting the specific needs of different groups. In other words, the new paradigm calls for educational models to diversify in order to adapt to different learners, instead of requiring learners to adapt to a one-size-fits-all model.

**Focusing on the basic objectives of reform**

The changes required for improvements in educational quality are numerous and complex, but it is advisable to make choices and set priorities among the various quality improvement objectives. In African contexts, factors relating to the school proper have overriding importance, but before they come into play there is a prior condition: one must have children who are ready to learn. This first objective shows how important early childhood protection and development are for success in school, particularly where children from the poorest segments of society are concerned. Similarly, it highlights the crucial importance of school nutrition and health programs in strategies to improve educational quality. The second objective – competent teachers – is central to any policy aimed at improving educational quality. Teachers determine the teaching and learning process through their attendance time, planning of instruction, the quality of teaching practice and organization, the relationship with pupils, evaluation and monitoring of their progress, and so on.
third side of the learning triangle is embodied in the third objective: a relevant curriculum and teaching/learning materials that make it possible to actually engage in the educational process.

These three objectives represent the essential inputs required for quality in a school, but they are not sufficient in themselves to produce quality. The structure, functioning and climate of the school will also determine the attitudes and behavior of the main protagonists – pupils and teachers – as well as how resources are used. This is why the fourth objective – effective schools – addresses precisely the conditions under which resources, regardless of their quality, are transformed into learning outcomes. These four objectives are inter-related, and achieving them will add considerable leverage to any strategy to improve educational quality.

**Undertaking needed reforms on the basis of a rigorous, realistic analysis**

The major reforms that are considered necessary to improve educational quality in Africa are not to be applied to all countries or in exactly the same way, nor even to all schools within a given country. The diversity of contexts and development situations makes it necessary to adopt differentiated, gradual approaches based on analysis of specific cases to identify the problems to be resolved, the order of priority of the various reforms, and the possibilities (particularly in terms of capacity and resources) of implementing them successfully. That said, the situation of education in Africa makes certain reforms necessary to the improvement of quality, some of which are discussed below.

The models of early childhood development prevailing in Africa, in the form of daycare centers and/or preschool education, are mostly reserved for the most well-off segments of society and limited to urban areas. Viewed from the standpoint of taking them to scale, these models are in keeping with neither the needs nor the resources of African countries. Some innovative alternatives exist, however. In most cases, they are based on mobilization of the resources and building the capacity of communities and families, with the aim of enabling them to provide on a sustainable basis for the protection and stimulation of preschool children. The incentive environment created and the activities undertaken to stimulate and develop all aspects of a child’s personality, provide balanced nutrition, and prevent and treat disease, help to prepare children from underprivileged backgrounds for success in school, and later on, for success in their social and occupational lives. Public policies that are firmly geared toward equity, accompanied by a minimum level of funding and support, can promote such mass models through an integrated approach that
mobilizes and unifies the various sectors and ministries concerned: education, health, agriculture, social affairs, communication, justice, etc.

A number of assessments have shown that teacher training, as practiced in many African countries, is not bringing the expected results regardless of the length of the training period. Reforms must be directed toward enhancing the professionalism of teachers and must be part of a continuum comprising initial training, integration of young teachers into the teaching force, in-service training, and assistance and advice to teachers. These professional development programs should encourage critical analysis of teacher perceptions and practices, learning through experience, self-examination, and peer dialogue in order to involve teachers, both individually and collectively, in the constant improvement of their methods and the affirmation of their professional identity through standards and codes of conduct. In this regard, the new technologies offer new opportunities for promoting the availability of teaching resources, distance training, interaction between teachers in distant schools, plans to introduce innovative teaching methods, etc.

Most of the countries concerned still need curricular reform to bring school-based learning more into line with the current and future realities and needs of African societies. Whether the skills acquired are meaningful and lasting will depend on their utility and whether they are used in practice to resolve the daily problems facing the population. African contexts present a variety of challenges in this respect: labor productivity, harnessing endogenous potential for development, promotion of a cultural identity, gender equality, improved health (HIV/AIDS) and nutrition, environmental protection, control of demographic problems (population growth and mortality), democracy building and social cohesion (conflicts), the fight against poverty, etc. It is therefore essential for each country to develop and implement curricula that are relevant, coherent, and realistic with respect to the specific challenges of the local context but also flexible enough to satisfy the requirements of families, communities, the market, the central government and the global advancement of humanity, while remaining open to change.

The issue of teaching languages occupies a central position among the needed reforms of African education. Both common sense and good teaching practice dictate that children begin their school-based learning in the languages they speak before entering school. Assessments of several experiences confirm that bilingual education models based on the use and affirmation of children’s first (African) language as the teaching language, followed by a gradual transition
to the second ("official") language, yields better learning outcomes than the
dominant models of monolingual education. Moreover, it has been amply
demonstrated that they are more cost-effective, owing in particular to their
positive impact on school efficiency, in terms of a perceptible reduction in
repetitions, dropouts, and failure rates.

The financing of education is an important component of quality. When the
wage bill absorbs most of the education budget, however, as is often the case
in Africa, the remainder cannot finance the other factors that contribute to
quality. And in this case, quality will not be achieved. The reforms to be
undertaken should enable approximately 33% of operating expenses to be
allocated to these non-wage quality factors, as suggested by the indicative
EFA framework. That said, the evaluations also show us that allocating more
resources to the basic inputs that make education at all possible does not al-
ways bring improvements in quality. It is also necessary that these resources
be allocated and used efficiently. On the one hand, cost-effectiveness stud-
ies based on meta-analysis of the information from evaluations allow more
informed choices of investment priorities, according to the impact of each
input on learning outcomes. On the other, there are cost-effective options that
allow a given level of resources to be stretched further without compromising
quality. Lastly, some reforms having little or no cost can improve quality by
mobilizing latent resources in the education system and/or its environment
(increasing teachers’ attendance time in class, rationalizing the teacher as-
signment process, promoting quality standards and mechanisms to recognize
progress and merit, mobilizing community participation, etc.). In any event,
improving quality in a context of scarce resources requires both realism as to
the reform options selected, in order to ensure sustainability, and imagination,
in order to devise highly cost-effective schemes.

Decentralization is not always good for education, but it certainly is when it
actually devolves significant powers and corresponding resources to stake-
holders in schools and the surrounding communities. Each school is unique,
and the quality improvement process therein unfolds according to character-
istics and at a pace that are specific to that school. When the people working
in and with schools become responsible for decisions and resource utilization
affecting the performance of the school, they become significantly more ac-
countable for quality, and more committed as well. Furthermore, creating ar-
eas for local autonomy and initiative encourages faster, more appropriate local
responses to the needs of schools, more cost-effective spending choices, and
meaningful mobilization of community participation in school management and in support for the learning process. Success will also depend on proper repositioning of the central education authorities to support the development of local capacity to actually assume the competencies devolved to the local level.

Identifying schools as the primary loci for qualitative change also points up the vital role played by school principals. The leadership provided by the principal in terms of the organization, functioning and climate of schools has a major impact on attitudes (values, opinions, commitment, involvement), behavior (attendance, punctuality, striving for excellence, etc.) and relations (trust, dialogue, solidarity, team spirit, etc.). For this reason, practice regarding the recruitment and training of principals needs to change. Principals should be recruited on the basis of a profile of abilities suited to the job, and trained in accordance with a grid of professional skills corresponding to their administrative duties and responsibilities and their leadership in pedagogical matters and in driving change. This last point is crucial to improving educational quality, since, above and beyond the principal’s transaction-driven role, he or she must seize the new autonomy of the school with both hands and seek to involve all stakeholders, including parents and communities, in transforming the culture of the school. The objective is to instill a culture of quality at the grassroots.

**Using the strategic framework as a guide to action**

As I see it, the strategic framework for improving educational quality contains three complementary components: an operational definition of a culture of quality in terms of a standard for its constituent attitudes and practices, identification of the critical points or pillars of any strategy to improve quality, and “road signs” indicating promising paths and warning against dead ends. Thus viewed in its entirety, the strategic framework must not be taken as a set of dogmas, prescriptions or recipes to be applied, but rather, on the basis of the lessons learned from the quality exercise, as a tool for informing deliberations over which options to take and which actions to conduct. The foremost value of a culture of quality is that academic failure is unacceptable and that equity combined with quality is not a utopian dream. Any child can learn under the right conditions. Combining critical analysis of educational activity and perseverance in steady efforts to make improvements, the culture of quality is also characterized by a constant concern for and ongoing action to evaluate and improve learning outcomes. Focusing on learning outcomes in this way
necessarily invokes and calls into question the factors that determine the effectiveness of learning: inputs, processes, procedures, and the environments of the education system, the community and families. Without neglecting environmental factors, the culture of quality views the school and the classroom as the decisive venues for the reforms needed to improve quality along certain critical lines: (i) creating learning opportunities at school, at home and in communities; (ii) improving teaching practices through critical analysis and commitment to innovation; (iii) taking up the challenge of equity through strategies to correct inequalities and differentiated educational responses to disparities and to diversity; (iv) increasing the autonomy and flexibility of schools to strengthen ownership, accountability and adaptation to the level of grassroots stakeholders; (v) eliciting community support to improve management and enrich the education provided; (vi) introducing a realistic financial framework to take account of limitations on resources and ensure sustainability; (vii) taking action concerning the HIV/AIDS pandemic and conflicts in order to overcome major obstacles to educational quality.

Like any other culture, the culture of quality is dynamic, changing on the basis of the lessons learned. Promising avenues grow wider and clearer as a result of ever-deeper research and analysis of the same theme, and dead-end approaches fall by the wayside and are abandoned as their failures accumulate. Educational programs, learning materials, learning time, infrastructure, teachers and schools, pupils and parents – all in turn must pass through this grid, revealing which practices are good and which should be avoided.

This is where the circle comes to a close, but in the spiral development we are concerned with, the end is just another beginning. And I would say, a two-fold beginning!

First, it marks a return to the beginning of the praxis approach, which, like improving the quality of education, is an endless process of qualitative change. Every country, every school, and every class is constantly called on to reflect on its experience, analyze its context, assess at which stage it stands, gauge the next steps to take, and develop a strategy and planned resources to overcome the barriers and achieve the objectives that it is capable of attaining within a visible future. This approach, based on the empowerment of those principally involved, rejects prescriptive or directive paradigms that have not improved quality one bit. Every country, every school, and every class begins with what it knows and what it does, evaluates this, examines it critically and tries to move forward at a pace commensurate with its capabilities and its resources,
but also in accordance with the needs and constraints of its context. The main thing, then, is to keep working for steady progress. This process of self-evaluation and gradual transformation is in fact what African countries embarked upon individually and collectively through the quality exercise. Every step forward will bring new challenges. This is the way the continuum of quality improvement works. It is neither a labor of Sisyphus, since the progress made can be real and measurable, nor a triumphant conclusion, since the work is never completed and never can be.

Second, the close of the circle is also the beginning of a new cycle in which countries, profiting from the lessons learned from this exercise, and the ADEA, on the strength of new shared understandings, seek to develop projects and partnerships to improve educational quality at both the grassroots and regional levels. Depending on the thematic choices made by each country, in accordance with its priorities, clusters of countries form around inter-country quality nodes, which are supported by regional institutions and strategic international partners specializing in the theme concerned: teachers’ professional development and innovative teaching methods, school leadership, decentralization, participation by communities and parents, adaptation of curricula, bilingual education, early childhood development and so on.

These quality nodes, organized into networks, are thus extending and deepening the quality exercise and the content of this book, working in close contact with the programs developed in individual countries. Activities are directed toward research and experimentation, sharing of knowledge, capacity building, publications and dissemination, policy dialogue and the establishment of new partnerships. All of this clearly reflects the praxis approach: learning by doing, learning from what was done, then returning to action in order to do it better. The inter-country quality nodes are thus expected to foster cross-fertilization of the lessons learned from the exercise to activity in the countries concerned. The strategic partnerships that have been established are also expected to provide effective support to this movement toward operationalizing the lessons learned from the exercise in the form of functional conceptual frameworks, methodologies and operational tools for successful implementation of strategies and policies to improve educational quality.

This book indeed opens up a wealth of promising vistas!
Acknowledgements

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The book is based on detailed reports from 22 country case studies, 8 papers from ADEA working groups and 33 background papers. The titles and the authors of these reports are listed in annex 1 and annex 2. The country cases were prepared by national teams with ADEA’s support.

For analytic purposes the contributions were organized around four themes. For each, thematic coordinators appointed by ADEA supported the national teams, analyzed the country cases and the background papers and prepared a synthesis of the findings related to the theme as follows:

- Pedagogical renewal and teacher development - Martial Dembélé and Be-Ramaj Miaro II;
- Decentralization and diversification of delivery systems - Boubacar Niane and Jordan Naidoo;
- Implementation of basic education reforms and innovations - Kabule Weva and Kabiru Kinyanjui;

Based on this material the chapters of the book were prepared by the following authors with the support of the editorial team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Setting the Scene</td>
<td>Charlotte Sedel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Reality of School Improvement: Moving Towards Clarity</td>
<td>Jane Schubert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What is the problem of Equity in Quality?</td>
<td>John Oxenham</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The entire process received support and advice from Mamadou Ndoye, Executive Secretary of ADEA. The team also benefited from the advice and guidance of (i) ADEA steering committee’s members at a meeting in Chantilly (October 26, 2002), and (ii) country case study coordinators and other education specialists at meetings in Paris (December 12-13, 2002) St Germain-en-Laye (February 9-15, 2003) and Bussy-St-George (from June 30 to July 3, 2003).
Chapter 1. Setting the scene

By Charlotte Sedel

Four years ago, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, all countries of sub-Saharan Africa reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of learning and completion of basic Education for All (EFA). Most education systems in the region are far from reaching these goals (UNESCO, 2002a), and the challenge implicit in this commitment is daunting. Less than one-third of the children of school age acquire the knowledge and the skills specified in their national primary education curriculum. This jeopardizes the very objectives of economic development, social progress, peace and democracy that are at the core of the New Partnership for African Development. Most critical is the challenge of quality.

An educated population is a precondition for meaningful participation in a world economy where competitive advantage is increasingly technology-based and knowledge-driven. Education has been found to be a key determinant of increases in productivity and improvements in health and nutrition (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991). It helps to lift people out of poverty, creates opportunities for social mobility and reduces economic and social disparities.

A large number of children remain out-of-school (Graph 1.1). The gross enrollment ratio of sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 varies from 29% in Niger to 131% in Cape Verde, averaging at 81.2%, lower than any other region in the world. Of the 115 million children of school age in the world not enrolled in school, 42 million, or 35%, live in sub-Saharan Africa, although it only has 10% of the world’s population. Enrolling these children represents a major challenge for poor African countries. Hanushek and Kimko (2000) found a strong link between the quality of labor (i.e., cognitive skills as measured by performance on mathematics and science tests) and economic growth. Increasing the number of years of instruction without paying attention to the quality of education and students’ learning achievements risks losing the positive effects of education investment on growth (Islam, 1995).

The challenge of basic Education for All has to a large extent become one of quality. In many schools in Africa, the learning achievement is so low that after several years of schooling the students still have not obtained basic literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore, if the improvement of quality of instruction is
not a focus, much of the EFA effort might be wasted. Wasted because important resources will be invested without being translated into learning outcomes and because children – future adults – risk dropping out of school too soon or being illiterate despite completing primary school.

To reach the objectives of Education for All, it is particularly important to ensure that:
- All children enter school;
- All children complete the primary cycle;
- Primary education imparts a set of basic competences.

Basic education systems in sub-Saharan Africa have made reasonable progress in terms of the first objectives, but major efforts remain to be undertaken to achieve the last two. Progress in these areas will require considerable improvement in the quality of education and measures that will ensure access to this quality education for the poorest populations.

**Graph 1.1 Distribution of out of school children in the world**

Source: UNESCO, 2002a

Quality and equity are thus the two inseparable objectives that countries need to pursue in their quest of Education for All. At this moment, most of the
African education systems are not able to deliver the knowledge and skills needed for economic growth, social development and civic progress. In this first chapter, the qualitative challenges of Education for All, the main elements that determine qualitative weakness and the constraints that have contributed to the qualitative underperformance of basic education in Africa will be reviewed. This discussion will be completed by a presentation of the methodology that guided the analysis of African experiences in the framework of the study.

The challenges of Education for All

*The World Education Crisis* (Coombs, 1967) drew attention to the problems faced by the education sector in virtually all developing countries resulting from the rapid influx of students, the shortage of resources, the increase in costs and the ineffectiveness of systems. Few countries were able to cope effectively with these challenges, and the problems of education development intensified during the 1970s.

Against a background of economic crisis and strong demographic growth (2.7% on average per year), the pressure on education systems increased in the 1980s. Spending per student in primary school as a percentage of the GNP per inhabitant dropped significantly between 1970 and 1983, going from $67 to $48 (in 1983 constant dollars – World Bank, 1988). The impact was felt at school through reduced availability of essential material inputs, fewer teachers, larger classes and a deteriorated infrastructure. Over time, the cumulative effect of this situation negatively impacted on enrollment and the quality of learning. The resulting stagnation of education development led the Jomtien Conference in 1990 to conclude that educational reforms should focus their efforts on “the real learning achievement and on outcomes rather than exclusively on school enrollment.” (UNESCO, 1990)

The objectives of Education for All thus had an important qualitative dimension from the outset. But over a decade later, progress towards the EFA objectives was found to be disappointing, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Education Forum of Dakar (2000) reasserted the commitment of all partners to the EFA goals while concluding that the challenges of access, primary school completion, achievement of learning and equity are inextricably linked to the implementation of policies in favor of quality Education for All.
Participation in education
The strong demand for education in sub-Saharan Africa is reflected in the increase of gross intake rate from 94.64% to 95.1% for boys and from 83% to 88.4% for girls during the 1990s and in the growth in the school age population from 58.1 million to 81 million.

However, these averages mask patterns of education development in the region that vary considerably. In 2000-2001, Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Uganda, Swaziland and Togo had reached the universal primary school participation objectives or came close to them. On the other hand, in eight African countries—Angola, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Niger and Tanzania—more than half of all school-age children remain out of school. In these countries reaching universal primary education remains a major challenge.

Entering primary school is the first step on a long education trajectory that is often strewn with obstacles. The fact that a student enters in first grade does not mean that he or she will complete primary school. A country with a gross enrollment rate of 100% may have a very low completion rate and therefore not reach universal primary education as defined in Dakar. Moreover, the increase in intake rates makes ensuring primary school completion and increasing the level of learning achievement the real challenges of the years to come.

Low survival rate in sixth grade
The second Dakar objective highlights the importance of ensuring access to a compulsory and free primary education of good quality and of completing it. In fact, a minimum of five years of a primary education of adequate quality is considered necessary to obtain the basic skills that permit individuals to fully participate in the economic and social development of a country and not fall back into illiteracy.

*Graph 1.2* compares the gross intake rate in primary school and the survival rate to grade six. It shows that there is a great variety of situations in sub-Saharan Africa and that most countries are located in the lower left quadrant, showing that good progress has been made in regard to initial access to school; the situation pertaining to academic performance, however, remains of considerable concern. Major efforts will thus be required to ensure that students enrolled in primary school will complete the cycle.
Learning achievement
Central to the challenge of Education for All by 2015 is what children have learned during their schooling. Being enrolled in grade five or six does not necessarily mean that the students have acquired the basic skills specified in the national curricula. Evidence from Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Namibia and Senegal shows a large proportion of learners in adult literacy programs who had attended primary school for as many as six years but who felt that they had not mastered the basic skills sufficiently. They were in fact seeking a “second chance education” (Chapter 3).

Graph 1.2 Survival rates in sixth grade and gross intake rate in primary school (2000)

Source: MINEDAF VIII, 2002

Indicators measuring learning achievement are useful for evaluating the sixth Dakar objective, which is “improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.” The essential question is therefore to know if these students have obtained this basic learning during their primary cycle.

Assessment of the average level of student learning causes serious concerns about the quality of education. In fact, no countries where tests have been
administered reach the Dakar objective mentioned above. Obviously, the
students do not learn what they are supposed to learn during primary cycle.
Learning assessments done by the Southern African Consortium for Monitor-
ing Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the Programme d’Analyse des Systèmes
Educatifs des Pays de la CONFEMEN (PASEC) and the Monitoring Learning
Achievement (MLA) program found that out of the 74% of the students who
reach grade 5, about 50% have not acquired the knowledge and skills speci-
fied in their curriculum, and 25% have performances below any acceptable
minimum. Several of the case studies prepared for this report (Annex 1) pro-
vide further supporting evidence. In Mauritania, Jarousse and Suchaut (2001)
found that the average primary pupil was able to answer correctly only 30%
of the assessment items in Arabic, French, mathematics and environmental
studies. In Guinea, similarly, pupils, who had persevered through the entire
primary school course and graduated from grade 6, were able on average to
achieve only 34% in French language and only 25% in writing on a standard
criterion referenced assessment. In contrast, the official aim had been to en-
sure adequate mastery through an average achievement of 75% (Barrier et al.
1998). In a similar assessment in Uganda, the average grade 6 graduate scored
only 24% for English reading and writing against an intended average stan-
dard of 75%, and only 15% of the graduates – just one in every seven – were
able to achieve or exceed that standard. In effect, attendance in primary school
in these three countries did not result in meaningful literacy for the majority
of pupils, both boys and girls. However, there are some countries (Togo and
Niger) in which nine out of ten adults who had completed primary grade 6
claim to be able to read easily.

The contrast between Mauritania, Guinea and Uganda, on one side, and Niger
and Togo, on the other, supports the observation that “… trends at country level
diverge sharply, with rapid progress registered in some countries, stagnation in
others and declines elsewhere.” (Bruns et al. 2003). National averages can thus
mask strong disparities in education opportunity in terms of wealth, geogra-
phical location, and gender. In most countries, the education systems are highly
inequitable in terms of access and opportunities to learn (Chapter 3).

Disparities in education
Despite the efforts over the last half-century and the mobilization of the in-
ternational community since the Jomtien Conference in 1990, poor and rural
people in many developing countries remain severely disadvantaged in terms
of education. In the great majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the
persistent delay in the provision of access to education is particularly alarming for girls. The slow progress toward the universalization of basic education comes in great part from continued low school enrollment in rural areas and poor areas (Chapter 3). When rural and gender disadvantage combine, the gap in educational disparities increases further.

For the gross enrollment rate for the year 2000-2001, the gender parity index for all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa is 0.89, but in Benin (0.67), Chad (0.61), Ethiopia (0.67), Ghana (0.68) and Niger (0.67) the index is well below the regional average. The index is generally higher for the gross intake rate, which indicates that in many countries girls drop out of school more often than boys: Benin (0.76), Chad (0.72), Ethiopia (0.73), Ghana (0.93) and Niger (0.68) (UNESCO, 2002b). On the other hand, gender disparities are not inevitable and can be affected by policy action. Out of the 24 countries for which data are available, nine countries, for the most part English-speaking – Tanzania, Lesotho, Madagascar, Namibia, Rwanda, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi and Zimbabwe – have a net school enrollment rate that is higher for girls than for boys. The gender parity index is higher in English-speaking countries than in French-speaking countries.

Equity concerns cannot be limited to gender. Ensuring access to quality education to the poorest children, especially those living in rural areas, will also require special attention. The poor performance of education systems influences the demand for schooling. In fact, the success of one student often has a positive effect on bringing other children in the family, the community and the society into school. Conversely, poor quality of education resulting in repetition and limited learning leads to dropping out and discourages parents from enrolling their children in school (Verspoor, 2001). It is therefore important to consider the link between the supply and demand for schooling.

The social demand for a quality education
The decision to send a child to school, ensure regular attendance and keep him or her enrolled depends on the social and economic outcomes expected by the parents. If the expected outcomes are greater than the costs (direct and opportunity), parents are likely to send their children to school. For poor parents, the direct costs of schooling are often a major constraint in the pursuit of their children’s education. In Uganda, for example, the primary school enrollment rate has almost doubled since school became free in 1996.
Dropping out of school may indicate that the balance of costs and outcomes, which usually favors school attendance when the child enters first grade, has changed a few years later. In poor families, for whom child labor often generates additional income, the opportunity costs associated with the child’s schooling will tend to increase with age and consequently the grade in school. However, when the quality of education is good, the benefits of schooling are likely to be perceived as high by the parents and students and will often outweigh the opportunity cost. In that situation, parents are often ready to contribute to the cost of schooling (Chapter 9).

But a number of children will drop out of school prematurely due to the high cost. This is especially the case when the school is too far from home or the relevance and quality of education is perceived as too low by the parents. Likewise, high levels of absenteeism on the part of the teachers may cause the parents to have a negative view of school. Finally, weak demand can be expected when the education that is provided is of low quality or perceived as irrelevant. Under such circumstances, it is not the children who drop out of school but the school that abandons the children. In order to reach these children, many countries have established alternative education programs that are designed to meet the specific needs of different groups of people (Chapter 9).

Nevertheless, the demand for schooling does not depend only on the school, and there are sometimes exogenous cultural, economic and social factors that play an important role. Yet, experience in several countries proves that it is possible to organize the school in such a way as to create an acceptable compromise between (i) a structure that integrates some elements of local tradition and constraints (contents and teaching methods, including the languages used and taught, the school calendar, activities, etc.) and (ii) a structure that provides children with basic cognitive, operational and social knowledge that will permit them to enter the job market and build a different future, one that is better than that of their parents. But the obstacles are many. In reality, few countries have been capable to develop quality education systems that serve all children. The section that follows reviews the factors that have an impact on the quality of education.

**The determinants of poor quality**
In most countries the problems of quality in basic education in Africa are linked to a shortage of resources for education and inefficient use of the re-
sources that are available. The consequences are a growing deficit of competent teachers and ineffective methods of teaching and school organization.

**Declining and poorly managed resources**

Public spending on education, expressed in percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) has been relatively stable over time for the sub-Saharan Africa region. But a detailed analysis done by Bruns et al. (2003) shows in fact that there is a wide range of situations. The countries in Group 1 have a costly education system with low primary completion rates (Mingat and Suchaut, 2000). The countries in Group 2 have the opposite situation.

### Table 1.1 Unit cost in % of GDP per capita, gross enrollment and completion rate of primary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Unit cost in % of GDP per capita</th>
<th>Primary GER</th>
<th>Primary completion rate</th>
<th>Year of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average of African countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bruns et al., 2003

In most African countries, more than 75% of all recurrent expenses in education are spent on teachers’ salaries. This means that the resources allocated to teaching materials, pedagogical support and professional development of teachers are too low to ensure a quality education. Rasera (2003) estimated the average unweighted public spending, apart from teacher remuneration, allocated for the day-to-day functioning of the primary school (in selected countries for which data could be obtained) at $9 per student per year, of which only $1.8 is available for school-level inputs. There can be little doubt that education of acceptable quality will require more resources to allow for increased expenditures on instructional materials (Chapter 12).
Too few competent teachers
The two indicators most frequently used to measure the overall quality of the teaching personnel in primary school are (i) the percentage of primary school teachers who have the required academic qualifications (general level of instruction) and (ii) the percentage of primary school teachers trained to teach according to established standards. It is important to note that these indicators are, in fact, not very useful indicators of the quality of education. Not only are the qualification and training levels of teachers in one country difficult to compare to those of another, but, in addition, they do not take into account the competencies acquired by the teachers through their professional experience. To this should be added the fact that the relationship between the length of the training received and the teachers’ competencies is not clear. As Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) pointed out, it is often important to reform the content and quality of training programs and not simply their length (Chapter 7).

In sub-Saharan Africa, many countries have a very high student/teacher ratio, although there are great variations, ranging from 26.1 in Mauritius to 71.2 in Chad. The median value in the 37 countries for which there are data is about 50 students per class. Moreover the variation within countries is even larger than the variation between countries (see Chapter 5). Even if there is no clear consensus on the relationship between class size and quality of education, it is nonetheless obvious that there are many situations in sub-Saharan Africa where the number of students in the class is so large that high quality instruction cannot be ensured (Michaelowa, 2003). In addition, the demand for new teachers is bound to increase dramatically between 2000 and 2015, as the average number of teachers to be recruited for new and replacement positions is estimated at 200,000 per year.

Table 1.2  Increase in the number of public school teachers, past and required

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public school teachers (in thousands)</th>
<th>Average annual increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>1557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Africa</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>2490</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MINEDAF VIII, 2002
The underperformance of education systems
Senior policy-makers have long recognized the low level of participation, completion and learning achievement in basic education as a major failure of education development. Virtually all countries have tried to address these problems – often with the assistance of external partners – through educational reform programs that often were announced with the anticipation of major change and the hope for radical improvement. Yet often the results have been much less than anticipated. The transition from an “elitist” colonial model to a mass education model capable of providing acceptable education quality for all has often been difficult and slow, especially as the objectives of quality and equity evolved to become more ambitious and the capacity to implement large-scale programs remained limited in many countries. These internal constraints have been exacerbated by external ones – an adverse international economic environment, an HIV/AIDS epidemic that has created new and additional challenges to education, and the persistence of war and civil strife in many countries on the continent. These issues are briefly discussed below and will be elaborated further in the chapters that follow.

Slow transition toward effective mass education models
Most African nations inherited colonial education systems, which, by all accounts, produced efficiently the civil servants needed for the most important sectors of the colonial economy (Moumouni, 1968). The schools graduated a tiny elite group of skilled individuals who were well versed in the language of the colonizers and possessed the “modern” attitudes perceived to be essential to function in “modern” though colonial organizations and societies. At independence, the leadership of the new countries came out of the ranks of the administrators, teachers, nurses and doctors who had graduated from these systems. When it came to designing the path for the economic and social development of their new nations and the role education was to play in it, they relied heavily on their personal assessment of the colonial systems. Hence, the policy context favored the continuation and expansion in content and, to some extent, purpose of the inherited colonial systems.

These policies resulted in an increase of average educational attainment on the continent from six months to three years from the 1960s to the early 1980s (World Bank, 1988). However, many countries began to question the appropriateness of the inherited systems. The expanded systems were producing: (i) graduates with less-than-acceptable learning achievements and attitudes,
(ii) high repetition rates resulting in (iii) high drop-out and low completion rates. It became increasingly clear that a system that had been efficient for the education of a small elite group was neither appropriate in terms of educational objectives and curriculum content nor affordable in the financial parameters of countries aiming to establish a mass education system and provide universal primary education.

All African countries have attempted to address this issue, often through successive reforms of their education system, aiming at:

• Curriculum reforms to link the content of education with African reality;
• Low-cost parallel systems designed to prepare children for life in rural areas; and
• Mobilization of parental and community resources and student’s productive work to encourage self-financing of schools.

The analysis of the discourse on these reforms and the evaluations of their implementation paint a contrasting picture of what “quality” meant to the stakeholders involved and for the strategies they devised. In reality, many reforms did not make it beyond the pilot stage, did not address the core issues of teaching and learning, or proposed models of schooling that were rejected by parents. Policies aiming to encourage the use of African languages as the medium of instruction, enhancing the relevance of curriculum content and introducing child-centered instructional strategies were rarely implemented effectively on a large scale. Alternative models of service delivery to reach children who were excluded from traditional schooling because of poverty or geographic isolation or other special circumstances remained outside the mainstream of education policy. Only rarely were resource parameters managed to balance system development demands and available resources, resulting in unsustainable unit cost, misallocation or severe under-funding of the education system. The experience with curricula reforms will be discussed in Chapter 6. The role of alternative systems is discussed in Chapter 9.

These problems came to the fore in 1990 when, galvanized by the World Education Conference in Jomtien, countries aimed to rapidly increase enrollments. Without concomitant increases in resources or increases in the effectiveness of resource deployment, these policies often resulted in reductions in public expenditures per student, low completion rates and low learning achievement. The recommitment to the EFA goals in Dakar has provided an incentive to many African countries to critically examine the shortcomings of past poli-
cies and to move toward a policy framework that integrates access and quality goals in a flexible, financially sustainable framework.

**The evolution of the quality concept**

The challenge of basic education policy is not only a challenge of quality but also one of equality: of equal opportunities to learn and achieve. The concept of equality has evolved over time. After being construed as equality of access, the goal was redefined as equality of opportunity, implying the provision of the same teaching and learning conditions to all students. Even more ambitious equality concepts, reflecting the preoccupations highlighted during the Jomtien Conference and intensified in Dakar, concern the equality of results measured by academic success. As a consequence, the indicator of progress towards Education for All went from a gross enrollment ratio of 100%, to a net enrollment ratio of 100%, to a primary school completion ratio of 100%. Even more demanding is the expectation that students who complete primary school master the skills and knowledge specified in the national curriculum. The first two perspectives highlight educational resources offered to students; the third and especially the fourth concept focus on the inequalities of results (output), in the sense that all students must have access to learning opportunities of acceptable quality and with adequate pedagogic support in order for them to attain the expected level of competence at the end of their schooling.

The problem of the weak performance of education systems can thus not be simply conceptualized as a deterioration of quality but should be seen rather as a challenge of growing ambitions and policy objectives in a context of decreasing resources and a much more diverse group of students.

**Low policy implementation capacity**

Many education reforms in sub-Saharan Africa have faltered on the shoals of implementation. In many countries, human capacity and institutions are not effectively used. In others, experience and skills are insufficient for the demanding and complex challenges of real education reform, i.e., programs that impact on what students learn in the classroom. There is little doubt that the weak managerial and technical capacities of the ministries of national education and other organizations and communities that act in the education sector are major obstacles to the improvement of education and learning (Moulton, 2003). As the number of children in school has increased and systems have grown larger and more complex, the challenge of building capacity for the
implementation of quality-focused education development programs has increased continuously (*Chapter 4*).

The international development agencies recognize the need for strengthening the capacities of ministries, but the strategies adopted have had, so far, limited impact. Since the 1960s, most bilateral and multilateral donors have implemented their programs through a “project approach,” which has generally consisted of supporting small-scale educational interventions. Each donor has carried out its own projects, most often without much monitoring on the part of the country’s authorities or collaboration with the projects of other sponsors. In general, the projects have contributed little to the systemic and sustainable improvement of the quality of education, and they have often remained pilots, dependent on foreign technical assistance (*Chapter 4*). In addition, the project approach has often resulted in a weak national ownership, a limited impact on the larger system and inadequate national financing.

Today, the importance of the coherence of the donors’ financing mechanisms and educational policies is widely recognized. It was to address this issue that the sector wide approach (SWAp) was developed in the late 1990s in Ethiopia, Uganda and Zambia. This new approach aims at establishing a complete sector development program and a framework for new methods of financing and managing education in which the national authorities are more involved (*Chapter 4*). It also provides a promising framework for the implementation of large-scale quality improvement programs.

**A difficult economic environment**

Today, 30 out of the 36 least developed countries in the *World Report on Human Development* of 2002 are in Africa. Over the 1990s, the annual per capita growth rate was negative in sub-Saharan Africa, at –0.4%. The absence of economic growth partially explains the inability of many of these countries to fight poverty and build a human capital foundation for sustained economic growth. The proportion of individuals having only a dollar a day to live on increased over the 1990–1999 period, from 47.5% (241 million) to 49% (315 million) (UNDP, 2003). The weak economic growth of many African countries weighs heavily on the availability of financial resources needed to meet the objectives of universal primary education.1 This means that few countries

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1. Cf. the research carried out by UNICEF (Delamonica E., et al., 2001), UNESCO (Brossard and Gacougnolle, 2000) and World Bank (Mingat A. et al. 2002) to estimate the resources the countries will need to achieve UPE.
will be able to finance UPE through their own resources and that the search for outside and private financing is imperative.

The slow growth of the industrial sector and the stagnating job market also affect the education system. Parents often perceive education quality in terms of preparation for further study or access to the modern labor market. When they realize that only few modern sector job openings exist, most of which require more than primary education, parents become reluctant to invest in an education for their children that is of poor quality and offers few prospects of tangible future returns.

**Impact of HIV/AIDS on the quality of education**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, with 28.5 million adults and children stricken in Africa, is a serious threat to supply and demand for basic education. The repercussions of morbidity and mortality linked to HIV/AIDS on the school systems of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have galvanized the attention of the international community. Many African governments have organized awareness and information campaigns for their populations and have also favored access to antiretroviral drugs. Evidence is emerging (Bennell, 2003) that in several countries these efforts are beginning to pay off. The intensive efforts in Zambia, Botswana and Malawi to fight HIV/AIDS most likely have had a positive impact on teachers’ behavior, as recent estimates show that mortality rates are not as high as often had been projected. This clearly means that the actions undertaken must be continued and even reinforced over time.

HIV/AIDS has a serious negative impact on the ability of teachers to carry out their work with the expected regularity. Teacher absenteeism is a widespread problem, partly due to inadequacy of management and supervision. Statistical data available on the extent and causes of teacher absenteeism, however, are rare and make the implementation of an effective action program difficult. In any event, the absenteeism of teachers caused by HIV/AIDS requires increased efforts to identify them and implement targeted and specific actions.

Information on the number of children directly stricken by the epidemic is, in most sub-Saharan African countries, very incomplete. The three groups of students whose lives are most directly affected by the disease are HIV-positive children, children living with sick people and children whose parents or guardians have died of HIV/AIDS. Because of very difficult family situations, orphans and children living in households affected by HIV/AIDS may be
forced to abandon school without any hope of going back. But an analysis of
the data on households from surveys conducted in over 20 countries in sub-
Saharan Africa indicates that it is hard to generalize about the impact of the
orphan status on enrollment rate (Bennell, 2003).

Every effective program to fight HIV/AIDS in the workplace is based on sev-
eral essential parts: an evaluation of the prevalence of the risk, education and
prevention, counseling and support groups, voluntary screening, deployment
and transfers, medical care (including making antiretroviral drugs available),
the fight against discrimination, replacement teachers and teacher support net-
works. And, most important, effective intervention will need to be based on re-
liable data and close monitoring of program impact. Education ministries can-
not act alone, and the support of sponsors, NGOs and the community is vital.

Education in countries in conflict
Many countries are now in crisis and emergency situations. From 1990 to
2001, 57 major armed conflicts in 45 different places were counted in the
world. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most severely affected. In these countries,
the challenges facing the education sector are enormous and complex. Build-
ings are frequently damaged or destroyed, textbooks and instructional ma-
terial also risk being spoiled. Parents and children are strongly marked by
violence that they have seen or experienced. According to Christopher Talbot
(2002), the planning directorates of the ministries of national education are
often poorly prepared to deal with these situations, all the more so as bilateral
and multilateral agencies generally have taken charge of a number of initia-
tives required to meet the needs of the populations affected by the crisis, more
or less marginalizing ministry officers.

The first steps toward reconstructing education systems are important. Rapid
access to education must be followed by a regular improvement in quality and
school coverage while strengthening the capacities of national institutions.
The process of reconstructing the education systems of countries in conflict
is a real challenge for all the actors who are led to work together (ministries,
sponsors, NGOs, communities, churches, etc.). But at the same time, it may
be an opportunity to introduce new promising reforms.
Objective and methodology of the discussion paper

Improving the quality of education is arguably the most critical element of successful EFA strategies in Africa. But real quality improvement, i.e., improvement in the teaching and learning process that results in enhanced learning outcomes, has been very difficult to bring about in both developing and industrialized countries. To intensify the discussion and stimulate reflection, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) selected the issue of quality in basic education as the central theme for its biannual meeting in 2003. The ADEA Steering Committee established an ad hoc task force to initiate and coordinate analyses of African experiences with quality improvement in basic education in order to support the efforts of the African countries involved in taking up the challenge of Education for All. The objective and methodology for the study are presented below.

Objective of the study

The central question investigated by the task force is:

*How can the countries of sub-Saharan Africa improve in a financially viable way the quality of basic education and learning?*

Quality is defined for the purpose of this study in terms of outcome: achievement by all children of learning objectives defined in the national programs and mediated by quality inputs and processes. Performances in the main subjects – languages, mathematics, science and social studies – are typically used to measure this outcome. But this is insufficient. The perceptions of the quality of education are very diverse among different stakeholders and may influence demand and subsequently the offering. For this purpose, three hypotheses guided the work:

- Many learning objectives (in particular the cognitive ones) are widely shared and express society’s expectations for students.
- Other learning objectives (notably those related to behavioral norms and values) will vary from one community to another; they often reflect traditions, culture, the socioeconomic environment and the parents’ mental images of education.
- The commitment to provide a quality Education for All pupils forces education systems to meet these different expectations by adopting a broadened vision of education and by creating a space for multiple learning paths, making it possible to respond to different perceptions of quality.
This conceptualization of quality is visually summarized in a model shown below in Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1** The transformation of inputs into outputs of schooling

The model is based on the standard input-process-output approach that was presented in the 2002 *Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2002a). It emphasizes that:

- Classroom factors (time, grouping procedures, instructional strategies) are key;
- School factors (leadership, emphasis on order, academic achievement) enable and reinforce;
- System factors (vision, standards, resources, relevant curriculum, incentives) provide direction; and
- Community factors (home environment, support for education) ensure local relevance and ownership.

A key hypothesis is that to the extent that all these factors are aligned, i.e., are pulling in the same direction, system performance will improve.
The objective, or rather the ambition of ADEA, is to effectively focus the attention and efforts of African countries and their partners on the challenges of improving quality in basic education as a key element of Education for All policies. The work of the task force was expected to help the emergence of enriched political visions and strengthened commitments as well as the development of a “culture of quality.” The participation of all stakeholders involved in the processes of change was expected to improve the environment, conditions, processes and outcomes of learning. This should help countries not only gain a better understanding of the key elements of quality improvement strategies but also acquire better ideas of how such policies may be instituted and implemented at the country level.

Methodology

The methodology is based on a participatory approach that values, above all, the documentation and the exchange of experiences by participants in the reform processes and the sharing of knowledge among countries in order to develop a broadened vision, a cultural anchoring and the institutional and technical capacities for the continuous improvement of the quality of education. This interactive process of learning assumes that each country learn from its own policies and actions by evaluating them and sharing these experiences with others in the region so that successful and promising experiences in improving the quality of basic education may be identified and analyzed.

The methodology of the study is the praxis approach that was adopted for earlier work of ADEA. This approach is based on the concept of “learning through action, learning from action to develop and improve action,” grounded in lessons that have been learned from country studies and set against the background of regional and international experience. The two main lines of this study are thus comprised of the analysis of national experiences and a review of the literature on four major themes:

- Pedagogical renewal and professional development of teachers;
- Decentralization/devolution and alternative education systems;
- Implementation of basic education reforms and innovations; and
- Relevance of education: adapting curriculum and using African languages.

All the members and partners of ADEA (ministries of national education, working groups, development cooperation agencies, NGOs, education networks and specialists) have been involved.
National experiences
The presentation of national experiences in the form of case studies makes it possible to communicate the experiences to other African countries and constitutes the basis of comparative analyses, sharing of experience and mutual learning. In total, 22 national case studies were carried out: eleven in French-speaking countries, ten in English-speaking countries and one in a Portuguese-speaking country (see Annex 1).

On the basis of lessons learned from national case studies, thematic syntheses were prepared with a view to a collegial reflection on relevant policies, strategies and practices in African contexts, which are certainly different but commonly characterized by inadequate resources and low capacities that constrain the options and opportunities in policy, reform and action.

Background papers
In addition to the case studies, education specialists were invited to write background papers on the four main themes and on subjects not directly connected to these themes but that deal more broadly with issues related to education quality improvement. These supporting documents made it possible to add to the findings of the case studies and place them in a much broader context of African and international experience.

In total, around 40 background papers were prepared by the ADEA Working Groups, the thematic coordinators, the agencies and invited consultants (see Annex 1). In addition, reviews of the African literature done by the researchers of the regional networks (ROCARE and ERNESA) have been included. This approach thus focused on endogenous experiences and knowledge and intentionally emphasized the search for African solutions to African problems. In other words, it is based on pedagogy of participatory learning that places the main actors in the center of the construction of their knowledge and know-how by actively involving them in strategies for identifying and solving problems. The participatory approach that has guided this exercise was carried out through the organization of three meetings with country case studies coordinators and authors of the background paper and intensive e-mail exchanges.
Organization of the paper

This discussion paper is organized as follows. It begins with a review of the current discourse on issues of quality and quality improvement (Chapter 2), equity and gender (Chapter 3) and approaches for external support (Chapter 4). This is followed by a review of evidence and experience from sub-Saharan Africa concerning the effectiveness of investments in different inputs (Chapter 5), curriculum relevance, especially in the use of African languages and adaptation to local context (Chapter 6), instructional strategies and teacher development (Chapter 7) and school effectiveness (Chapter 8). The paper then reviews sub-Saharan Africa’s experience in with the provision of a range of learning opportunities, differentiation of programs and the diversification of providers (Chapter 9), and changes in the way education systems are managed (Chapter 10), and students’ learning progress is measured and monitored (Chapter 11). It discusses the financial implications of accelerated progress to the Education for All objectives (Chapter 12), provides a strategic framework for quality improvement (Chapter 13) and discusses some key elements of an education policy focused on quality improvement (Chapter 14). A complete list of country case studies and background papers can be found in Annex 1.
Chapter 2. The reality of quality improvement: Moving toward clarity
By Jane Schubert

Quality exists when students demonstrate knowledge. The almost universal focus on quality improvement in education is driven to a large extent by the inability of students to show that they have acquired in school the knowledge that parents and society expect. Decades of research that fill volumes of journals, seminar proceedings, and the documents of professional meetings have resulted in a robust body of knowledge on school effectiveness and improvement. It is both amazing and disappointing that so little of what is known has actually been utilized to improve national policy and local practice. Even in industrialized countries the increasing knowledge about educational change and quality in terms of technical information, the expansion of research competence, and the emerging interest in teaching and learning at the classroom level, has not resulted in large-scale improvements in student achievement or accelerated student learning (Hopkins, 2001). Much – but not all – of this research is from the industrialized world, but its findings can stimulate reflection on commonalities with the experience in developing countries.

The Dakar Framework for Action includes a specific target on quality (Target 6):

*Improving all aspects of the quality of Education for All, so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy, and essential life skills.*

The important message of this target is that quality is centered on measurable learning outcomes for all.

**Perspectives on quality**
Defining quality is more frequently debated than articulated. Adams (1993) presents some persistent questions that surround attempts to define “quality” – so as to understand and utilize the concept of quality. He draws distinctions between efficiency, effectiveness, equity and quality, identifies multiple

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2. Dakar Framework for Action (2000). Similarly, the Millennium Challenge Account, the Fast Track Initiative, the G8 summit and the USA No Child Left Behind Act (2001) all express similar concern about the quality of basic education.
meanings of quality (as defined in the literature as inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and value added) and attempts to operationalize it by listing possible characteristics of quality such as: definable in context; integrated with efficiency and equity; not associated with high costs; potentially valuable across settings with agreed-upon goals and contexts.

Almost a decade later, UNICEF (2000) presented a definition of quality education that had five characteristics: learners who are healthy and ready to learn; environments that are safe and adequately resourced; content reflected in relevant curricula for acquiring basic skills; processes that use child-centered learning; and outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes and link to national educational goals and civic participation. UNICEF’s quality model centers its concept of quality on the outcomes. UNESCO expanded the definition of quality to include a special emphasis on gender perspective and a demand for education to reflect upon its relevance to the world outside of school, to social dimensions. It is based on education as a human right and includes areas such as: peace and human rights; improved quality of life; addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic; literacy; and teacher education (Pigozzi, 2000). In the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (2002), UNESCO specifies the key variables that affect education outcomes in an input-process-outcome model that links together the various stakeholders in education as a guide to the assessment of education quality.

A classroom-anchored working definition of quality guided a decade (1991-2003) of USAID activity focusing on teaching and learning. This operational approach applied a process that stimulated dialogue about quality in host countries by pointing to the “essential elements of student progress toward meeting or exceeding locally appropriate standards (expressed in measurable outcomes such as academic achievement in numeracy, oral expression, and reading), conditions of learning environments and instructional strategies and resources that strive to treat all students equally so that learning is not hindered because of characteristics such as gender, socio-economic status, geography or ethnicity” (Schubert, 1993; p. 1).

All these definitions highlight the different elements of the basic input-process-output model that commonly underpins education research and policy analysis. It has also guided the analyses presented in this book (see *Chapter 1, Figure 1.1*). It emphasizes the importance of both cognitive and affective results (mediated by quality inputs and processes) measured by the extent to which pupils achieve knowledge, skills and behaviors specified by a national curriculum.
The central message of this chapter, which emerges from the knowledge base of the past few decades, is that knowledge about what students have learned and can do and the link to instructional practice stems from systematic information about teaching and learning drawn from the classroom. The classroom is the “workplace of learning” – the authentic setting where the intended beneficiaries of any educational change (i.e., reform) demonstrate measurable improvement (or non-improvement) as a consequence of that change. Knowing more about why progress toward improvement does and does not occur can only emerge from ongoing and systematic examination of the environment where the change/improvement is to occur.

This chapter briefly summarizes the multi-faceted research perspectives that contribute to the knowledge base of educational policy and practice on quality and student learning. Much of the existing body of knowledge stems primarily from education systems and school environments in industrialized settings, although there is a growing knowledge base of school effectiveness and enhancing schooling in developing countries (Hopkins, 2001; Scheerens, 2000). It provides a very brief summary of “where we stand” in terms of the knowledge gained through the research and the extent to which this knowledge is useful and/or appropriate to other, diverse contexts such as educational policy and practice in Africa. This chapter thus provides the backdrop for the review of African experiences in Chapters 6 through 8 and the discussion in Chapters 13 and 14 on the main elements of the quality improvement strategies that are emerging on the continent.

**What is known about quality improvement?**

Three decades of research and evaluation from a variety of independent but complementary perspectives provide several lenses through which quality may be viewed and upon which concrete action may be taken throughout the hierarchy of an education system. The overall attempt is to understand and ascribe meaning to education policy and practice assumed to result in increased performance of teaching and/or learning or both. The Coleman report (Coleman, et al., 1966) in the United States and the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council, 1967) in the United Kingdom can be regarded as the historical landmarks of empirical research and practice on quality. They ascribe most of the variation in student learning to socio-economic factors and raise questions about the impact of schools. The reports provoked a considerable body of research and practice on what has become known as “school effectiveness.”
Early research in this tradition was primarily intended to disprove the findings (i.e., to prove that “schools mattered” in student learning achievement). The central questions that have animated and continue to animate effective schools research later expanded to include:

What school-related factors account for student achievement and, ultimately, the successful completion of schooling, after controlling for external factors such as family background or socio-economic status? Among these factors, which ones most affect teaching and learning? How can schools be improved to provide an environment conducive to learning?

Research on school effectiveness moved beyond these quantitative survey based methodologies to more qualitative perspectives and in-depth analysis in the 1970s (Rutter, et al., 1979; Edmonds, 1979). From this research emerged an abundant and widely quoted literature on school effectiveness and school improvement, comprising studies of individual projects, reviews of national education sector strategies, case studies of activities, meta-analyses of clusters of studies and reviews of reviews! A few years later researchers began to focus more specifically on the processes of school improvement. (Fullan, 1982; Huberman and Miles, 1984)

By pinpointing the specific factors within the education system that influence teaching and learning, this research has created a knowledge base that policy makers, planners and practitioners can learn from and build upon, thereby avoiding a “reinvention of the wheel.” The challenge is to extract the core elements from the available evidence to stimulate a dialogue which results in evidence-based policy and practice that address specific national priorities. Dimmock (2000) offers a summary gleaned from the literature on school effectiveness and restructuring – a term that embraces “policy and practice aimed at transforming education across all levels from system through regional and district to school” (p.8). He distinguishes between reform (a term applied to change that remains undefined), restructuring (transformation of a school – leadership, governance, management) and design (a more intentional focus to structure and process, a linkage among the elements, and reinforcement among the parts). Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationships among the key components of a system, and within each illustrates functions at a particular level. The bottom line is improved student learning outcomes. The intermediate variables are critical to connect the school activities to the classroom functions, as derived from the literature.
Resourced environments
Scheerens (2000) compiled evidence from industrialized countries according to various strands of educational-effectiveness research: school effectiveness in equal educational opportunity research; economic studies on production functions; evaluation of compensatory program; effective-schools research; and studies on instructional effectiveness. He includes a table of the main components of 14 factors positively linked to effectiveness. Table 2.1. summarizes the most important ones.
### Table 2.1  Key factors of effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factors</strong></th>
<th><strong>Components</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational leadership</td>
<td>• School leader as information provider&lt;br&gt;• Initiator and facilitator of staff professionalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum quality/ opportunity to learn</td>
<td>Setting curricular priorities&lt;br&gt;Opportunity to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>(a) <strong>Orderly atmosphere</strong>&lt;br&gt;• The importance given to an orderly climate&lt;br&gt;• Good conduct and behavior of pupils&lt;br&gt; (b) <strong>Climate in terms of effectiveness orientation and good internal relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Perceptions of effectiveness-enhancing school climate&lt;br&gt;• Pupils’ engagement&lt;br&gt;• Appraisal of roles and tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative potential</td>
<td>• Monitoring pupils’ progress&lt;br&gt;• School process evaluation&lt;br&gt;• Use of evaluation results&lt;br&gt;• Keeping records on pupils’ performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective learning time</td>
<td>• Time&lt;br&gt;• Monitoring absenteeism&lt;br&gt;• Time at classroom level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Scheerens, (2000)

The overall conclusion of these analyses is that, in industrialized countries:

- The impact of resource-input factors is fairly small.
- There is agreement on the relevance of factors for school improvement such as leadership, staff cooperation, achievement oriented school policies, but when subjected to meta-statistical analyses, the impact of school-organizational factors is small to medium.
- School-effectiveness factors linked to between-school variance of achievement scores explain only a small (about 10%) proportion of total variance in student achievement, although the average may conceal striking differences – as much as one year of schooling – in the school experience of a student in one of the most effective schools compared to students going to the least effective schools (Hopkins, 2001).

In a review of more than 100 sources, Gauthier et al. (2003) examined research on effective pedagogy and schools in both an industrialized and a developing country context. The research targeted studies that favored the success of students whose schooling may be influenced by malnutrition, absenteeism, repetition and dropout, so as to derive commonalities between the two contexts.
and increase the relevance of the findings to a development context. One overall conclusion was that within the literature on the industrialized countries, “the most effective measures to favor students from disadvantaged milieus are found directly in the classroom” (p. 22). The key finding is that “school can make a difference in the academic performance of young people despite a disadvantaged socioeconomic context.” Further, the most effective instructional practices must focus on teaching and on basic skills learning and use direct instruction. The hope is that this focus, over time, will not only improve the ultimate success of the pupil, but also increase successful completion rates.

Yet each of these approaches to school effectiveness has its limitations as a tool for improving student achievement. For example, Scheerens suggests that: (i) the attention to individual schools inadequately addresses how national systems function; (ii) a focus on instrumentality that sees goals and objectives as more static than dynamic and does not recognize the need for change or adaptation; and (iii) an inability to adjust to issues related to equity and efficiency (Scheerens, 2000). Dimmock also points to the limitation of checklists that may oversimplify complicated processes – they emphasize neither the what nor the how of improving the quality of schooling. He further argues that the school effectiveness advocates have often assumed a “one size fits all” model that would be effective for all students regardless of gender, age and ability.

It is very important when searching for findings that can best and usefully inform educational planners and implementers to disaggregate the findings, particularly when considering their application to new and diverse environments. Even though limitations may be cited for particular research directions, it does not mean that all is lost. Indeed, much has been learned and can be used in a wide range of different settings. The task is to distinguish between what is and is not applicable and in what context. The attempt in this chapter is to extract that which strategically focuses on pupil learning. Hopkins presents a summary of the legacy of effective school movement as analyzed by Murphy (1992):

- The educability of learners – it’s possible for all children to learn;
- A focus on outcomes – examining indices of learning to identify value added;
- Taking responsibility for students – don’t blame the victim (the student) for the shortcomings of the school; schools should take a fair share of the responsibility for students’ learning performance; and
- Consistency throughout the school community – treat the school as an organic whole, more than the sum of its parts, and don’t focus on only the parts.
Hopkins refers to the emerging group as pragmatists who combine both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. What’s happening now is a shift away from the “templates” of the past and the need to be more reality-based in planning and implementing any policy or intervention that strives to improve student achievement. The world is different than it was when many of these “movements” began: schools are being called upon to respond and “fix” social problems; parents are demanding more accountability; students are pressured to consider choices and at an earlier age; governments are installing universal standards and increasing measurement to meet those standards, while national boundaries are blurred and global priorities for work and leisure gain prominence.

Hopkins frames the need to move into this complex, evolving and more global society as the requirement to be “authentic” – to strategically focus policy and practice on learning. Authentic strategies address the process and the outcome of student achievement but also acknowledge the necessity of productive management within schools. This authenticity brings a focus on outcomes, targets teachers and learners, aims at consistent implementation of strategies and recognizes the importance of cultural context. However, the essence of the authentic school improvement strategy is that “powerful learning and powerful teaching is the heartland of the authentic school improvement.” (Hopkins, 2003; p. 71). This means a change of instructional focus from test scores and examination results to building the cognitive and affective skills of students. It also means that teachers need to learn how to teach their students how to learn while they are acquiring knowledge in specific curriculum content. It implies a move from schooling to learning as the focus of action.

Another voice for the integration of theories, experiences, and findings from several bodies of, particularly, the effective schools and school improvement literature is Dimmock (2000). He argues for the restructuring of education by proposing a more holistic approach that acknowledges the relationship among all segments of the education sector – and often to other sectors such as health, or democracy and governance. The current work on designing learner-centered schools utilizes knowledge from learning theory, organizational theory, teacher development, management, and culture. Schools are viewed in this perspective as dynamic and flexible.

A meta-analysis of comprehensive school reform (CSR) in the United States reviews the research on the achievement effects of CSR and summarizes the specific effects of 29 implemented models (Borman et al., 2003). The targeted
schools are mainly (70%) high-poverty schools with low student test scores. Many of these schools have been confronted with a revolving door of reforms and new initiatives that are seldom linked to evidence of success. The research usually occurs after implementation and innovations may even have been dropped in the wake of a new and different activity. The overall conclusion is that schools that implemented CSR models for five years or more showed strong effects that were consistent across schools of varying poverty levels. The review identifies 11 components that represent a comprehensive and scientifically based approach to school reform including most importantly:

- Proven methods for learning, teaching and school management;
- High-quality and continuous teacher development;
- Measurable goals for academic achievement;
- Integration of instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement and school management; and
- Annual evaluation of progress.

**Less fiscally resourced environments**

A critical constraint to using the findings of this research on schooling and teacher effectiveness in African settings is the inappropriateness of transferring models from industrialized to developing countries. Gauthier *et al.* (2003) argue in the review mentioned before that the experience of working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds in industrialized countries may provide important lessons for school improvement in developing countries. One of their key findings is that in disadvantaged settings effective instructional practice is explicitly organized to teach the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as a basis for higher-order applications. Such a focus, they found, will “develop cognitive and affective competencies rather than favoring the latter over the former” (p. 22). The authors hypothesize that such a focus over time may not only favor the success of these students at risk but also improve their completion rates and long-term participation in personal and civic futures.

Reviews of the literature on effective pedagogy in developing countries find a litany of negative factors such as *unstable political conditions, weakness of teacher preparation and support, exploding school participation, and unsupportive conditions for teachers*. Scheerens (2000) presents a review of earlier reviews summarizing 96 studies on the estimated effects of resources on education in developing countries. The two input variables with the most
frequent positive significant association (above 50% of the studies) to achievement in developing countries are teacher education and per-pupil expenditure. The other three input variables – teacher/pupil ratio, teacher experience, and teacher salary – are also positively and significantly associated with achievement in 27% to 35% of the studies. These percentages are higher than those found in studies in industrialized countries (Hanushek, 1997).

Research on school improvement in developing countries began with a seminal effort in examining the change process at national and local environments in a cross-country study in Colombia, Ethiopia and Bangladesh (Dalin, et al., 1994). The combined effort of 14 researchers collected qualitative data over a four-year time period. Six critical factors emerged:

- Concrete, locally available, ongoing in-service training linked to practice and peer collaboration;
- Timely and relevant support from local and district educators that relates to instructional practice;
- An environment of high expectations to produce results and share successes;
- Shared responsibility through decentralization of management and administration;
- Use of locally-developed teaching and learning materials that strive toward mastery of teaching and learning; and
- Active community roles in funding and management of schools.

Heneveld and Craig (1996) presented a conceptual framework identifying factors affecting school effectiveness, often referred to in the literature on developing countries: supporting inputs, enabling conditions, school climate and teaching/learning process, all leading to student outcomes. This model was used as the research framework for a baseline study on educational quality in primary education (e.g., information on pupil performance, parents, communities, teachers, learning materials, etc.) in Uganda in 1996. The model proved useful in pinpointing opportunities for improvement by revealing that although many schools were “significantly short” on the components of effectiveness, where they were present, they did influence school effectiveness (Carasco et al., 1996).

A very informative set of research activities from 1993 to 1997 were conducted through an International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) inter-regional research project (Carron and Châu, 1996). The outcome of the four-country analysis is a nine-dimensional framework used to analyze school
functioning within the local education environment (e.g., characteristics of the context, relationships within the school, teaching/learning process and teaching process measured against objectives).

Adapting knowledge derived from industrialized country experiences to developing countries so that it can inform successfully policy and strategy under very different conditions remains a major challenge for the design of education reforms in developing countries. Several reviews focus on this issue. Jansen (1995) suggests that a critical weakness of the school effectiveness literature is that it suggests a recipe for effectiveness that limits the user’s understanding of change and is not universally applicable. Scheerens (2000) summarizes his review of the “strands” by reporting that the provision of basic resources makes most of the difference in developing countries, particularly for the most deprived schools. A decade ago, Farrell (1992) noted that resource-scarce environments require attention to cost-effectiveness and efficiency that may not be required in wealthier environments. Choices may require trade-offs that add to one activity while subtracting from another.

These reviews of the effectiveness of pedagogy and school organization in industrialized countries offer important insights for the design of education reform programs in developing countries:

- Adopting instructional approaches should be done gradually and with caution, until there is evidence of increased student learning – note particularly some “discovery” approaches whose success is linked to individuals rather than sustainable practices – and feasibility in overcrowded classrooms with poorly prepared teachers and severe shortages of learning materials.
- Depending on successful pilot projects to solve national education problems is not strategically sound, as they often fail – often for logistical and financial reasons.
- Viewing the school only as an economic input-output system ignores its important social system features: adapting teaching conditions to the local culture, integrating communities into the functions of the school and keeping parents informed of their children’s progress so as to engage them in supporting schooling.

The recently completed review of the school improvement efforts of the Aga Khan Foundation over the past 15 years is particularly instructive to developing nations because the program was implemented in Africa, the activities
stemmed from a common set of strategic principles applied in a variety of situations, and projects lasted no less than three years, some as long as ten (Anderson, 2002). Moreover the challenging conditions under which the donor, the governments and the NGOs worked are shared by other nations. The six key design features underlying the foundation’s effort to improve teaching and learning are: change is school-based; the whole school is the unit of change; ongoing teacher development is at the heart of the improvement process; improved school management and organization is essential to support teacher capacity to implement change; a strategic plan for institutionalization of the school improvement effort must be in place early; and mobilization of stakeholders as partners for substantive involvement is of central importance.

In a concluding chapter Hopkins provides an external perspective on the Aga Khan initiative, offering several conclusions that merit attention for future planning:

- The approach fell short of fulfilling the results-oriented expectations of current performance-based standards around the world.
- A better balance between strengthening capacity and accountability measures at the local level needs to be found.
- The understanding and application of child-centered methods by teachers remains limited.
- There was little evidence of a positive impact on student learning from child-centered methodologies as applied by Aga Khan supported schools.

Hopkins acknowledges the very challenging task of implementing reforms that result in long-lasting improvements in student achievement. He suggests that one reason is the fragmented nature of policies that address only one component of the education system, e.g., teacher training or curriculum redevelopment. He points out that any change in teaching and learning in the classroom must not only involve teachers’ behaviors but also their beliefs. The lessons to consider for authentic school improvement are that:

- Change takes place over time.
- Change initially involves anxiety and uncertainty.
- Technical and psychological support is crucial.
- Learning new skills is incremental and developmental.
- Organizational conditions within and in relation to the school impact school improvement.
- Successful change involves pressure and support within a collaborative setting.
Using the knowledge
What are the building blocks from all this knowledge and experience that can help policy makers and program developers design activities that are technically sound, logistically manageable, and address national priorities? There is consensus that “one size does not fit all.” The knowledge base enriches dialogue within specific national activities but there is no known universally applicable template for success. But the accumulated wisdom and experience of previous decades brings out several principles that can guide the design of national programs:

• Focus on learning – raise the level of pupil achievement and the skill of teachers and teacher trainers.
• Establish a process of continuous improvement in teaching by ensuring coherence between teaching strategies, curriculum content and learning needs and developing the skills of teachers and teacher trainers.
• Recognize the school as the unit of change and ensure that reform strategies are congruent with the hopes and aims of policy, the values of a school and the beliefs of a teacher.
• Attend to the implementation requirements necessary to insure that a scheme has a fair opportunity to be tested.
• Examine the evidence for success if adapting or adopting a particular strategy.
• Think strategically about the link between the national policy, system management and the local practice – in terms of ownership, capacity building, implementation, and sustainability.
• Broaden civic participation to establish education goals – be realistic so as not to build in failure.

From a quality perspective, the critically important measure of the relevance of the experiences documented in the research and the reviews presented in this chapter is the extent to which they are useful in improving student achievement and identifying the factors that influence this outcome. The way forward must be charted with approaches and processes that apply what has already been learned to the situation as it exists on the ground, and systematically examine how policies and interventions are being implemented and the extent to which they are making a difference in student performance. Policies and programs only become effective in the classroom; research and analysis will therefore need to look increasingly inside the classroom.
Once inside, it is necessary to examine the dynamics of the classroom and to gather very specific information about what is happening. For example, what teachers know about the content they are expected to teach and how do they teach it, what resources are available and how are they used, what resources are not available, what pupils do when they come to school (i.e., how they use materials, what materials they have to use) and what they know throughout the cycle. The results of such systematic and continuing examination must then be shared throughout the education sector so all stakeholders within the sector receive specific information about action they may take to improve a policy or a practice and how their action relates to other components. For example, if those responsible for teacher training learn that some teachers are unable to understand the materials provided, then the implication is that something needs to be done within the professional development of teachers. The curriculum specialists must then examine their materials in the light of this finding to decide what action may be appropriate from the curriculum development side to address this issue.

The path to accelerating progress towards education quality suggested above represents a dramatic shift in determining policy and developing programs because it reverses the traditional top-down approach to reform. It is a bottom-up approach because the choices to be discussed begin with information from the ground – the source of the implementation. The Improving Educational Quality Project (IEQ), funded by USAID and implemented from 1991 to 2003 in 17 countries tested such a “cycle of improvement” (see Chapter 8, Box 8.5, for an example from Uganda). The process begins and ends in the classroom and employs multi-methodological approaches to reduce the misalignment between the educational goal of quality and the political priority of quantity. These dual pursuits of political and educational agendas share a common goal: the successful completion by all children of the primary school curriculum. The IEQ process pinpoints the factors that sustain this misalignment and provides realistic and concrete information from the classroom to form the basis for corrective action in policy and practice. The idea is to bring quality and quantity into alignment (Schubert, 2001).

The lessons from IEQ are an important guide for further progress on the path to quality improvement:

- The classroom is the source of authentic knowledge about teaching and learning.
• The knowledge generated from the classroom creates a common discourse for dialogue about how to improve policy and practice.
• Knowledge shared at all levels of the education sector – from the classroom to the offices of the Ministry of Education – stimulates the translation of research into practice.
• Linking factors that influence teaching and learning leads to increased understanding about the dynamics of the classroom.
• Involving in each country educators at all levels in examining classroom dynamics and sharing the findings strengthens local ownership of the process and the capacity to sustain and integrate the process within a national system.

Education reform as a mechanism for change has a history of successes and failures. But because the EFA targets of access and quality remain unfulfilled in much of sub-Saharan Africa, governments, donor agencies, institutes of education and the private sector need to consider a strategic framework for action that reflects the lessons of research and experience. It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel. It is important to apply what has been learned in an ongoing and systematic process that addresses the reality of the education context.
Chapter 3. What is the problem of equity in quality?
By John Oxenham

This chapter attempts to identify options for responding to the question, “How can government policy promote equitable progress towards the Education for All goal of universal primary completion with good quality education?” The word “quality” implies the acquisition of knowledge and skills specified in the curriculum. It implies a shift from simple equality of access to equality in treatment and eventually greater equality in attainments. Since inequality often arises from inequity, equity will almost always have to feature as a central purpose of public policy.

Inequality and equity
The discussion takes the indicator of quality to be the retention of the students who enroll, i.e., low dropout rates and high completion rates with a large proportion of learners achieving their learning targets and small disparities in learning attainments among regions, schools, social classes and genders.

Available data indicate that failure to reach quality in this sense arises less from inequalities in the abilities of different groups of children to learn and more from “supply” and “demand” factors. “Supply” denotes the availability of educational facilities – although not necessarily schools – and the quality of teaching, content, learning materials and other components of an education system. These factors clearly can be addressed by government policy.

“Demand” denotes the willingness and ability of families to enroll their children and to sustain their support in ensuring that the children attend regularly, apply themselves diligently and persevere to the end of their courses. Demand factors can be more difficult to address through government policy, but, as will be shown, are certainly not beyond its reach. Indeed, the data indicate that the main sources of the apparent ineffectiveness of education and of the inequalities in the achievements of different groups of children are probably inequities in the distribution and application of human and material resources and therefore well within the power of government to redress.
This chapter takes the term “equity” to indicate fairness, reasonableness and impartiality in providing the opportunity to learn. Conversely, the term “inequity” connotes unfairness, possibly arising from neglect, partiality or misguided decisions. The basis for assessing “fairness” is “rights based,” in the sense that every child not only has the universally recognized right to an education that satisfies generally accepted and applicable criteria of adequacy in the context of a particular society but, in addition, has the right to two further expectations. The first is that government will ensure the availability of all the necessary facilities for an adequate education. The second expectation is even stronger: Government will do whatever it can to remove all obstacles to the child’s access to education and effective learning, even if some of these obstacles exist within the child’s family and circumstances, and will help, even induce, the child to enroll and persevere. Governments are thus expected to ensure that, as soon as possible, every child can and will take up his or her right to basic education.

Although the literature often discusses equity and equality together, this chapter focuses on equity and adopts what Grisay (2003) terms the “realistic” ideology: “Since a certain degree of inequality is the very foundation of any society, it is only necessary to combat injustice in the school system and not inequality itself.” However, it is of course the presence of inequalities that points to the possibility of inequities: Each inequality then requires examination as to its sources.

As regards inputs and resources, which Grisay discusses under her heading of EQUALITY 1 (equality of opportunity), some government schools tend to enjoy better buildings, better facilities, better supplies of teaching and learning aids and resources and, most important, higher proportions of reliable, competent and committed teachers than the average, while others are left much worse off than the average on all these dimensions. Such inequalities or disparities would of course suggest some inequity or injustice.

As regards process and treatment – Grisay’s EQUALITY 2 (equality of treatment) – learners of one gender or from some social groups tend to do much better or much worse than the average. While some variation among individuals is to be expected, large and systematic variations between the genders or among social groups suggest that some are being treated better or worse than others and again that there is some inequity or injustice.
Similarly, there are schools that exhibit lower than average intake rates and higher than average rates of repetition and dropout, and thus lower rates of completion and lower than average levels of attainment in national assessments – Grisay’s EQUALITY 3 (equality of results) – as well as schools that do the opposite, i.e. there are inequalities among schools. The Benin and Mauritania cases document huge variations in attainments among schools: In some schools the average attainment is 80%, whereas in others it reaches only 10%. The two governments clearly attribute these inequalities to inequities for which the system itself is responsible, for they plan deliberate measures to reduce them among regions, zones, types of school and gender.

On all these dimensions, governments proceed on the assumption that, under conditions of equal access and equal quality, the observed wide inequalities of outcomes in learning will be narrowed and that the correlation between gender or social class or place of residence and educational achievement will be much weaker and ideally may vanish altogether. In effect, increasing equality of learning outcomes has become an international, universally agreed goal and, in that guise, a driver of national policy and action.

**The correlates of disadvantage**

*Table 3.1* takes data from 19 countries of sub-Saharan Africa to show that the three long and well-known factors of poverty, rural residence and gender persist as the strong correlates of ineffective education. Ideally, the three should show no correlation at all with these access or quality indicators. If access and quality were equally available and distributed, why would poor and rural children or girls on average *necessarily* attend less regularly than the country average, or repeat and drop out more than the average, or learn less than the average? The fact that disparities on these indicators have been reduced and even reversed in many countries underlines that they are indeed not intrinsic but subject to policy, action and mitigation.

Before a discussion of the indications of the data, some limitations need noting. First, *Table 3.1* does not take into account factors such as ethnicity (some ethnic groups may either suffer discrimination and disadvantage or, on the contrary, enjoy disproportionate privilege), life-style (some populations, such as nomads, practice patterns of living that make conventional modes of education impracticable), culture (some religious groups prefer not to send their children to conventional schools), or difficult circumstances (families living through civil conflict, refugees, orphans, children caring for sick parents).
Table 3.1  Social disparities according to various indicators for primary education in 19 countries in Africa*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Gross enrolment rate (%)</th>
<th>Intake Rate in the 1st Year (%)</th>
<th>Survival Rate (%)</th>
<th>Completion rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample average</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (Boys–Girls)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio (Girls/Boys)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>103.5</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (Urban–Rural)</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio (Rural/Urban)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income quintile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 (wealthiest 20%)</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 (poorest 20%)</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference (Q5–Q1)</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio (Q1/Q5)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The countries are Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone, Togo, and Zambia.
Source: Mingat. 2003b

Such factors currently affect large numbers of children in Africa, even though the numbers in any given country may be small relative to the entire population. The table then deals with countries only in very broad terms. Nevertheless, it serves to sketch a set of generally recognizable circumstances. A second is that the 19 countries in the sample may not be fully representative of all 48 in sub-Saharan Africa. Even so, they serve to point to situations that are true of most, albeit to varying degrees.

The first point to note in Table 3.1 is that in these countries taken as a whole, the Primary Completion Rate (PCR) is less than half, even for the boys, and just over a third for the girls. In part, the PCR is a result of the school intake and survival rates. The implication is that in most countries large proportions of boys and girls drop out early and do not complete their primary education. Further, the clear disparities among the boys, among the girls and between the boys and the girls suggest inequalities generated by inequities in regular access to schooling and, in particular, in the overall quality of the schooling experience.
The second important point is that the most important determinant of education disadvantage is wealth, as shown by the difference in education performance between children of the wealthiest 20% and the poorest 20% the population. For the Primary Completion Rate, this gap is very large, in fact four times larger than the difference between boys and girls. It is possible that this huge disparity arises solely from the situations of families and from no inequity in access to or treatment in school at all. In fact, it is more than probable, as several studies over several decades have suggested (see for example Lipton, 1977; Nuna, 1993; Moulder, 1994; Adae-Mensah, 2000) that the greater influence of the wealthiest families over government policy skews the distribution of public resources inequitably towards the children of those families and away from children who are in greater need of those resources, thus exacerbating the inequity of schooling outcomes.

The second most important determinant of disadvantage is whether a child lives in an urban or rural area. Although not as large as the disparity between richest and poorest for the primary completion rate, it is still three times more than the difference between boys and girls. For these children “natural” obstacles such as distance and dispersed settlements or mobile populations are likely to reinforce inequities in the opportunity to learn.

Finally, while the difference on the gender dimension is smaller, it is still significant and large enough at 11% to require direct action. In fact, it is cumulative, exacerbating in most countries the disadvantage of girls vis-à-vis boys in poor and rural communities. These differences in education opportunity and performance caused by poverty, rural habitat and gender are indeed inequalities. Do they arise from inequities in the opportunity to learn? Do they reflect injustice? The following paragraphs consider them in order of descending magnitude, beginning with poverty and concluding with gender.

**Poverty**

In the column “Intake Rate to the first year (%)” in Table 3.1, nine out of ten children from the wealthiest families enter school, while only five out of ten in the poorest families do so. In seven countries, fewer than two out of ten children in the poorest quintile of the population attend school: Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Niger, Somalia, and Sudan (Huebler and Loaiza, 2003). Is this difference due to inequity and, even if it is not, can government policy mitigate it?
The experiences of Botswana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda suggest both that the direct cost of schooling had created an inequitable burden on families, constraining access to school for the poorest, and that the governments can indeed mitigate it. When those governments abolished fees for primary schooling, enrollments increased to an almost overwhelming degree. That suggested that the fees constituted an obstacle that was indeed inequitable, because the government had imposed it and in doing so impeded many children from their right to primary education. In effect, the government created a supply but at the same time damped down demand. This is an instance of the government’s influence on demand factors. In releasing the clearly pent-up demand, some governments had difficulty in ensuring that supply coped with it. It is likely then that, if more states abolished fees and other monetary charges for primary school, enrollments would more than likely expand rapidly.

After entering primary school, how do the children from the wealthiest and poorest families use the education available? Table 3.1 shows the survival rate, which is the percentage of the students enrolled in grade 1 who continue their education into the final year of the primary course. Again, the children from the richest families show a large advantage. Nearly eight out of ten make it through to the final year, whereas, among the children from the poorest families, just over four out of ten do so. The disparity between the richest and poorest groups in the primary completion rate is even greater than the disparity in survival; whereas almost seven out of ten students from the wealthiest families complete successfully, fewer than three out of ten from the poorest families do so.

Are these differences also due to inequity? Even if they are not, could the government do something to mitigate them? The answer here has to be more complex, because the reasons for dropout can be several and are likely to be particular to a given country or even a given district or locality. Table 3.2 summarizes at least some of the known contributing factors and sketches counteracting measures that have been tried in some countries and might be possible in others. For the moment, it will be useful to look at the observations of some recent research. Dachi and Garrett (2003) remark, “According to Eldring et al. (2000) … inability of households to meet the basic needs of children (education, food, shelter and clothes) in most cases forces children to engage in employment in their endeavor to improve their conditions and livelihood” (p.10). They further report that Amma et al. (2000) found that working
### Table 3.2 Disparities in school survival: possible contributors and mitigators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible contributors</th>
<th>Possible causal factors</th>
<th>Due to inequity in the education system?</th>
<th>Possible mitigators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irregular attendance</td>
<td>- Distance to school</td>
<td>- Only insofar as non-school options have not been adopted</td>
<td>- Multi-grade and distance learning approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Recurrent illness</td>
<td>- Probably not</td>
<td>- Health services in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Family’s need for labor, earning: caring for sick parents</td>
<td>- Probably: corporal punishment deters boys, sexual harassment deters girls</td>
<td>- Consultation with family on options to enable regular attendance; parent-teacher and community support possibilities; monetary stipend and scholarships; “Take Home Food” programs, especially for girls, in very poor areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fear</td>
<td>- Possible prejudice, antipathy, victimization on the part of teachers</td>
<td>- Better preparation of teachers, better monitoring by head and senior teachers; enabling parents to discuss problems with school authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Poor relations with teachers</td>
<td>- Probably not, but possibilities of teachers making students more aware of disadvantages</td>
<td>- Awareness raising and training for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Feeling disadvantaged vis-à-vis other students</td>
<td>- Multi-grade and distance learning approaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient learning</td>
<td>- Malnutrition, hunger</td>
<td>- Probably not</td>
<td>- Breakfast, lunch feeding programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Lack of texts and other learning materials</td>
<td>- Possible inequities (i) in distributing supplies to schools in poorer areas, and (ii) in pricing;</td>
<td>- Free texts, subsidized prices for writing materials for schools serving poor populations; more effective distribution; consultation and education for unschooled parents*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Difficulties with language of instruction</td>
<td>- Possible inequities in language policy and in quality of teachers stationed in poorer areas</td>
<td>- Reform of language policy; more equitable distribution of effective teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher absenteeism reduces time-on-task;</td>
<td>- Possible inequities in quality of teachers stationed in poorer areas; possible higher rates of teacher absenteeism and lower rates of time on task and time spent in actual learning</td>
<td>- More equitable distribution of effective teachers; stronger accountability for teachers’ presence in classrooms and for time spent in actual instruction and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Unqualified, incompetent, demoralized teachers</td>
<td>- Boredom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Boredom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinuation despite good attendance and successful learning</td>
<td>- Direct costs of school uniforms and other charges</td>
<td>- Possible inequity</td>
<td>- In poorer areas, dispensing with uniforms, requiring cheaper uniforms or subsidizing uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Opportunity costs of earning power</td>
<td>- Probably not</td>
<td>- Incentives to offset opportunity costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Onset of puberty for girls</td>
<td>- Possibly not, but possible misbehavior by male teachers and older students</td>
<td>- Consultation with parents and community supports; severe sanctions for misbehaving teachers and students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This suggestion derives from an experience by World Education Inc. in Guinea, as reported in a personal communication by Barbara Garner. “We talked to [adult] class members in six communities around Guinea. Something they were talking about in response to the broad question of ‘What have you learned?’ was that the actual act of being learners themselves had sensitized them to the needs of their kids in school. They realize now that they need their pens, they need to study. Therefore, when their kids ask for money for a pen, they give it to them rather than shoo them away. They give their girls less housework (hauling water, etc.) and more time to study. All anecdotal, but nicely compelling.” The interaction between parents’ education through adult basic education and literacy programs and their children’s schooling will be examined more closely in Chapter 9.
children contribute about 40% of the household income that is geared to basic food items. Eldring et al. (2000) found, for example, that in Kenya children were regarded as a source of livelihood for poor families. These observations confirm what has long been well known: Very poor families need the labor of their children and in most societies they seem to need the labor of their girls more than that of their boys.

In case it may be thought that very poor families see no value in educating their children, it is necessary here to emphasize the seriousness with which poor families treat the education of their children. A very recent study (Boyle et al., 2003) shows that in Uganda and Zambia the poorest families devote—sacrifice would be a better word—no less than 33% of their discretionary household income to their children’s education. “There is a notable willingness amongst the poorest to pay… and to make sacrifices for, what they perceive to be good quality education.” The inference is that the low survival rate is probably not due to a failure to recognize the importance of education or to a failure of demand. Rather it is due to defects on the supply side, which conspire to put opportunities for equity education outside the reach of the poor.

“Deficient learning” is in fact very likely to be the strongest contributor to these findings, and poor quality instruction is very likely the strongest explanation for the low survival rates and the failure of students to satisfy its requirements for formal success, even though they have persevered through the full course. The size of wealth-related disparities in survival and completion does imply that inequity in the opportunity to learn is probably at the root of the disparity in success. That is to suggest that the governments have failed to ensure the equitable distribution of teachers, materials and other facilities and allowed it to be skewed in favor of the students from the wealthiest families and to the disadvantage of those from the poorest. Such bias is of course not confined to the richer families. Large proportions of teachers share it, because they understandably prefer to serve where the amenities for themselves and their families make life more comfortable.

Boyle and her colleagues (2003) found that in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, as well as in three countries of Asia, poor parents defined quality “predominantly in terms of the availability and competencies of teachers.” Equity would require that the children of these parents enjoy an equal probability with the children of rich parents of attention and instruction from able, committed, punctual and punctilious teachers. The facts in every country suggest that the
common interests of the teachers, the better schools and the richer families coincide to make it difficult for governments to effectively address this particular element of equity.

Stated more positively, however, the finding indicates that a state committed to equity and determined to ensure it could do a lot to improve the probabilities of successful learning for children from the poorest families. This corroborates the conclusion of Colclough and Lewin in 1993 and of Bruns et al. (2003) ten years later: The attainment of universal primary completion depends even more crucially on education system reform than on incremental financing. An early step towards reform is suggested by Mingat (2003a) in the context of targeting groups subject to inequity: “A possible means of establishing concrete actions could be to construct a poverty map and to target areas with a high proportion of families living in the deepest poverty” (p. 9). The increasing availability of household surveys should facilitate such a step (see for example the study by Huebler and Loaiza, 2003).

**Rural residence**

In turning to the second most powerful correlate of disparity in indicators – geographic location – it is useful to start with some reinforcing statistics.

*Rural vs. urban enrollments* – Mingat’s survey (2003a) shows that, in sub-Saharan Africa, 88.4% of urban children are in school, compared to only 65.4% of rural children. In seven countries, more than seven out of ten rural children do not attend school: Burkina Faso, Comoros, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Somalia. In Somalia, which has the lowest net enrollment rate of the countries in the sample, nine out of ten rural children are not in school. In six countries, the disparity between urban and rural areas is greater than 40 percentage points: Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Niger.

In fourteen countries (out of 18), the disparity between urban and rural enrollment rates ranges from 20 to 40 percentage points: Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, and Togo. On average, children in rural areas in Africa have an enrollment rate that is 26% below the rate for urban children. In seven countries, the enrollment rate in rural areas is less than half the one in urban areas: Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Niger.
On the other hand, in sharp contrast, six countries show a disparity between enrollments in urban and rural areas that is only 5 percentage points or less: Gabon, Kenya, Sao Tome and Principe, South Africa, Swaziland and Uganda. Interestingly, too, all of these countries have relatively high enrollment rates overall, ranging from 68% to 93%. These numbers indicate a high correlation between a high enrollment rate overall and a reduced disparity between boys’ and girls’ enrollments. What these six countries demonstrate then is that rural residence is neither an absolute nor an insurmountable barrier either to enrollment or to regular attendance. The inference then is that the disparities in the other countries arise from inequity, caused by neglect or inaction.

Although rural residence does tend to be associated with lower than average rates of enrollment, especially for girls, Mingat (2003a) shows that it is not entirely separate from the factor of poverty: A structural relationship exists between geographic location and household income. Analyses carried out in the various countries demonstrate that income is not generally uniformly distributed among the various areas of dwelling. Indeed, even though some proportion of poor people live in urban areas, the large majority of households from the poorest quintile live in rural areas, and, to a slightly lesser extent, the majority of households from the wealthiest quintile live in urban areas. Controlling for household wealth, the urban-rural difference almost disappears. That indicates that the disparity in primary school enrollment between urban and rural areas is thus highly associated with the widespread poverty among rural residents of Africa.

Yet the examples of the six countries with relatively small differences in the rural/urban dimension suggest that the elimination of poverty is not a precondition for substantially reducing the larger differences in the other countries. Clearly a well-focused set of policies will enable very poor families in both urban and rural areas to enroll and keep their children in school until they successfully complete the course.

**Gender**

The third correlate of disparity in indicators is gender, which is to say that girls in the 19 countries are at systematic disadvantage *vis-à-vis* boys on all four indicators in Table 3.1. Overall, only one girl in three is likely to complete primary school, compared with one out of every two boys. Amongst the girls from the poorest rural locations, only one in five is likely to do so, leaving four out of five excluded from a full primary education of good quality. While
demand factors may play a role in causing this disparity—see for instance FAWE’s programs in the Maasai communities of the Kajiado district in Kenya (Mbilinyi, 2003)—the experiences of countries in Asia and Latin America demonstrate very clearly and, indeed, the improving rates in many African countries confirm, that governments can mitigate them substantially. For instance, between 1990 and 1999 The Gambia improved the gross enrollment ratio for girls from 57.6% to 71.2%, narrowing the gap between them and the boys from 18.7 to 7.9 percentage points. Perhaps more striking are the figures on survival rates from grade 1 to grade 5 for 19 countries in Africa: In 11 of those countries, higher proportions of girls survive than of boys (UNESCO, 2002a). Also, in none of the other eight did the gender parity index (the ratio between girls and boys) fall below 0.85 (i.e., the girls’ survival rates were not far behind those of the boys).

Even more indicative of the variation in the way gender issues can be affected by policy is reported by Huebler and Loaiza (2003): In 27 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, boys are more likely to attend school than girls, but in seven other countries, girls are more likely to be in school. In nine countries there is no statistically significant effect of gender on school attendance. These facts seem to indicate that under the right conditions the impediments to girls’ education will give way. What governments have to do is identify and bring about those conditions.

The disparity between boys’ and girls’ education has received much attention because African girls have traditionally been less likely to attend school than boys. The survey’s results confirm that a gender disparity continues to exist in sub-Saharan Africa, but it is less severe and more variable than in previous decades. The efforts to increase girls’ participation in education thus appear to have been at least partially successful (Huebler and Loaiza, 2002). However, the case reported from the Kajiado district of Kenya makes it clear that there are still situations where social norms and traditional cultures can militate against the enrollment and continuation of girls in school and simply have to be confronted and combated by judicious direct action. Also, as Boyle and her team (2003) have reconfirmed in their research in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, when families have insufficient resources to educate all their children and have to choose between boys and girls for schooling, they tend to decide in favor of the boys – usually with the assent of the women and the girls themselves. The inference is that, if education were free of all directly monetary costs, such families would probably choose to educate all their children, not just the
boys. Here solutions must be devised to reduce and eventually to eliminate the circumstances under which families have to face such choices.

Treatment in the classroom: The preceding paragraphs have discussed gender disparity as it affects enrollment and retention in school, both, of course, essential for an education of good quality. There is, however, an additional dimension that affects quality. That concerns how teachers treat different learners and what expectations they have of the abilities of different groups of learners. The long and widely shared view that mathematics, science and technology tended to be boys’ subjects has led to girls not being expected to do well in them and even being discouraged from pursuing them. As the report of the 12-country FEMSA project has demonstrated, this widely accepted “fact” is not an unalterable fact of nature but decidedly a result of social expectations and teaching practices by both male and female teachers (Obura et al., 2000).

It is inequitable for teachers to give girls the false impression that they cannot match the attainments of boys and to expect less from them than they can actually achieve. It is also inequitable for teachers in their classroom behavior to allow boys to capture more attention and encouragement than girls. These are behaviors that can be changed through information and training.

Primary completion: Despite these hopeful observations, the current situation in several countries does reflect substantial probable inequity and demands appropriate action to assure all girls, but especially poor rural girls, a decent primary education. Table 3.3 offers data from eight countries in Africa to underline the disadvantage that poor rural girls confront and to reinforce the point that the disadvantage can be substantially mitigated. The eight countries – six of them are in West Africa, seven are Francophone and none is Anglophone – listed are indeed not representative of all 48 states in sub-Saharan Africa but the table does serve to illustrate the range of disadvantage that exists currently.

In all eight, the PCR for girls in general lags behind the national average by between 1 and 15 percentage points. The gap is least in Madagascar at only one point, but there the overall PCR has most unfortunately deteriorated by 7 percentage points in 10 years, and rural girls are at the severest disadvantage, 15 percentage points behind the national average for girls. Indeed, only one rural girl in nine was likely in 2000 to complete her primary education. The gap is greatest in Mozambique, where the overall PCR has indeed risen by 6 percentage points but where the PCR for girls has actually deteriorated by
two points and only one rural girl in seven was likely to complete her primary course. In all eight countries, the rural girls lag behind the national average for all girls by margins ranging between 4 and 15 percentage points.

**Table 3.3** Proportion of children reaching the sixth year of schooling: data from eight African countries, 1990 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gross enrollment rate (%)</td>
<td>Completion rate (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income Country</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average of the 8 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mingat. 2003b. – Magnitude of social disparities in primary education in Africa: gender, geographical location, and family income in the context of EFA.

Despite the discouraging trend of these data, the experiences of Mauritania and possibly also Togo that were mentioned earlier suggest that governments can take effective remedial action. In both countries, substantial proportions of girls do now complete their primary education. Further, in Mauritania the gap between the rural girls and the others is the smallest of the eight. In Togo, although this gap is indeed wide, nonetheless nearly half of the rural girls do complete their primary course and they have in fact by far the highest PCR for rural girls of the eight countries, a full 15 percentage points ahead of Mauritania. The inference is that other governments in Africa, which sometimes are overwhelmed by the difficulty of mitigating the gender disparities in primary education, would do well to study how and under what conditions the governments of Mauritania and Togo managed to reduce the gender gap. The fact
that these two governments could indeed reduce the disparities indicates that they probably arose through forms of inequity and lie well within the power of governments to eliminate.

Success and promotion: Many countries measure the quality of primary completion with a standard national examination (see Chapter 11 for a detailed review). There is some evidence that recalls the earlier discussion of the treatment of girls, once they have enrolled in school. Table 3.4 below summarizes a comparison between the performances of boys and girls on Tanzania’s Primary School Leaving Examination and shows three tendencies, one encouraging, another suggesting the possibility of a sustained bias against girls, while the third appears to reflect poor quality in most primary schools.

### Table 3.4 Performance in the primary school leaving examinations (PSLE) in Tanzania by sex, 1996-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass (%)</td>
<td>Fail (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>71.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The minimum pass mark is 61 out of 150 marks (about 41%).

The Net Enrollment Rate stood at 48% for females and 46% for males during those years.
Source: Mbilinyi (2003), using data from The National Examinations Council of Tanzania, Primary School Leaving Examinations Results for Year 1996-2002.

The encouraging aspect is that between 1996 and 2000 the pass rates for both genders did improve a little. However, the fact that fewer than a third even of the boys could achieve even the minimum, relatively lenient pass mark indicates that most schools fail to offer education of a satisfactory quality. Finally, the fact that the pass rate for the boys is nearly double that for the girls suggests that most girls do not have an equitable opportunity to learn.

The presumption of inequity in the success rates in graduating from primary school is continued into the rates of transit into secondary school in 16 countries. Table 3.5 shows that in every one of the 16 countries higher proportions of boys than of girls make it into secondary school. The narrowest disparity appears in Tanzania, where very small proportions of both genders enroll in
secondary school; the widest of 19 percentage points appears in Liberia. In a situation where secondary schooling involves families in substantial expense, the tendency noted earlier for poor families to decide in favor of educating their boys rather than their girls seems to prevail.

Table 3.5  Transition rate to secondary schools of selected countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gross Enrollment Ratio in Secondary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoro</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Africa</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Republic of Tanzania</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Gender, equity and future generations: Studies going back several years have shown that children of mothers who have themselves been to school are more likely to attend school than those of mothers who have never been to school. Huebler and Loaiza (2002) in their study of sub-Saharan African countries reconfirm that finding, as does Valerio (2003) for Ghana. Indeed, the effect of the mother’s education is exceptionally strong: In 16 African countries children of mothers with primary education or higher are at least 20 percentage points more likely to be in school than children of mothers with no schooling, even after controlling for other factors.

These numbers reinforce the case for focusing on girls’ education in the Millennium Development Goals because they indicate that educating a girl is not
only beneficial for the child herself, it also increases the likelihood that future
generations of both girls and boys will enroll in ever higher proportions, at-
tend school more regularly and complete their courses.

Much the same point can be made for offering adult women who have either
never been to school or who had to drop out before they completed their
primary schooling opportunities to educate themselves. Studies in several
countries, most recently in Ghana by Valerio (2003), show that even participa-
tion in an adult literacy program can move mothers to enroll their children in
school and to insist on their regular attendance.

**Conclusions on gender and equity:** However, more important than the prevail-
ing disparities are the facts that girls’ enrollments do seem to be increasing,
even if more slowly than desired, and the gaps between them and the boys do
seem to be narrowing. While this observation is no ground for complacency,
it is an antidote to hopelessness and a stimulus for more action and more
resourcefulness in combating the underlying inequities. Overall, the data
discussed above suggest simply that gender, the smallest correlate of school
performance of three indicators of disparity, can be quite susceptible to miti-
gation, even when exacerbated by poverty and rural location. An observation
by Bruns et al. (2003) supports this inference: They note that completion rates
for girls improved faster than those for boys during the 1990s.

Clearly, poor families’ needs for their daughters’ labor, parental concerns
about the safety and integrity of their daughters, religious inhibitions about
educating girls, early marriages and other well known impediments on the de-
mand side can be gradually overcome, when the supply of education is avail-
able and the economic constraints are mitigated. If a government can devise
policies and practices that will enable all girls from the poorest rural families
to complete a primary education of good quality, it will likely have eliminated
all the major obstacles and inequities that currently impair primary education.
From there, it could proceed to fine tune styles of teaching and the design
and content of texts to mitigate more subtle biases that undermine successful
learning by girls.

**Mitigating inequity**

If Mingat’s general argument is true that the major problems of access and
quality concern the rural poor and, in particular, poor rural girls, a government
genuinely committed to universal primary completion will give marked prior-
ity to examining the obstacles and possible inequities that affect that population. The physical distribution of the various sub-sections of rural dwellers, factors of distance, infrastructure and transport for ensuring the delivery of learning materials and technical support, patterns of economic and social life, local attitudes to and demand for schooling for girls, the attractiveness of particular locations for professional teachers in terms of housing, water and fuel supplies, health and education facilities for their own children, security for women teachers, will all have a bearing on strategies to ensure that every rural child – and every poor rural girl in particular – enjoys his or her right to an education of adequate quality.

This constellation of factors may necessitate that a government think strategically less in terms of schooling alone and more in terms of a variety of modes of basic education. Chapters 9 and 10 will look more closely at efforts to diversify the delivery of education within an integrated and coherent system. Here it is necessary simply to point out that schools need not be the only vehicle for education. In many countries, many families prefer to educate their children at home within broad guidelines from the government, while other governments have made special arrangements by correspondence, radio and television to help rural families in remote locations ensure that their children are not left behind. Equally, teachers need not be drawn only from professional bodies of civil servants. There are possibilities of helping local men and women develop the skills to enable local children to learn enough to avoid undue educational disadvantage later in life.

Flexible strategic thinking will of course include the consideration that the government need not be – and in most countries is not – the sole provider of education. Private suppliers, missionary societies, other charitable bodies and even community organizations have well established roles in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, governments would do well to examine how such partnerships might be strengthened and expanded in the interests of equity and quality. As Bruns et al. (2003) remark, “Indeed, increased service delivery through community schools, alternative schools, non-profit private schools and schools run by non-governmental organizations is in many developing countries a key strategy for achieving more efficient use of public resources and more equitable geographic coverage” (p. 9).
Equity in resource allocation

Achieving equity in the supply and take-up of education of sufficient quality will most likely involve new inequalities in the distribution of finance. Currently, the inequalities observed in enrollments, perseverance, attainments and completion may well arise from inequitable inequalities in the distribution of resources that ensure adequate quality – finance, sound infrastructure, effective teachers, supplies of learning materials. Correcting such inequitable inequalities in the interests of greater equity may well result in inequalities in unit costs.

For instance, it is likely that ensuring the rights of girls in tiny and remote mountain communities will prove more expensive per child than ensuring the rights of children in towns with good communications and amenities. Providing reliable teachers from outside the community could require special, relatively expensive, incentives to persuade them to come to the community and stay for at least a couple of years. Alternatively, training teachers from within the community could prove expensive in the costs of training and continuing technical support. Feeding programs to ensure that children from very poor families in towns, villages or very small communities are well enough nourished to be able to learn effectively will obviously increase the costs of ensuring equity in education in disadvantaged locations in relation to the costs of education for better off, more accessibly located families. Similar considerations will of course apply to ensuring equitable education for children with disabilities or who are caring for sick family members or are in a variety of difficult circumstances. In effect, equity in pursuit of closer equality in access, quality, attendance, perseverance completion and attainments will need to attract a higher priority than strict equality in financial allocations.

In relation to this point, Bruns et al. (2003) urge, “…ministries of education must achieve greater equity and efficiency in allocating finances and deploying personnel across different regions and across schools, as well as between administrative support services and school-level delivery.”

Equity and excellence

An associated issue that affects allocations is the pursuit of excellence in education. Nobody would oppose excellence; indeed, all would commend it. However, modes for nurturing excellence often involve either clustering excellent resources, like outstandingly effective teachers, in centers of excel-
lence, or allocating additional resources for excellent learning materials and facilities, even when insufficient resources are available to ensure adequate quality for all. Can excellence then be an enemy of equity? From the perspective of the public interest, is equity a higher priority than excellence? Since a basic education of adequate quality has been universally accepted as an essential human right, there can in fact be no dispute that, in public education priorities at least, equitable quality for all must come before excellent quality for some.
Chapter 4. Emerging partnerships for quality improvement
By Jeanne Moulton

The growing number of students in primary schools in Africa has put a huge strain on the budget and human capacity of every country that has committed to the Education for All goals of getting more children into school and giving each student a good-quality basic education. The formidable challenge is not only to provide effective physical facilities and teaching and materials and improve teaching practice but also to do so at a national scale and at a cost that governments can afford over the long term.

In Africa, efforts to improve quality on a nationwide scale have almost always received significant support from international lenders and donors. Quality improvement is a central element of the international commitment to Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction, and the increased use of democratic practices and good governance. These international movements are providing a strong impetus to getting more children, especially girls and children in poor families, into schools that provide real opportunities for learning. Thus, the discussion of strategies for large-scale quality improvements must be placed in the context of the emerging new partnerships arrangements between government and international agencies and the growing role of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

This chapter looks at the attempts of African countries and their international supporters to bring about system-wide, sustainable improvements in quality. It describes the decline of the “project” approach, which until recently was the dominant mechanism for external support to education, and the advent of the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp). Based on preliminary documented experience, the chapter looks at the effectiveness of the SWAp in producing sector development programs and discusses their promise and limitations in terms of improving the quality of education.

The growing scale of reforms
Prior to 1990, most ministries of education served a limited number of children, reaching many of those in urban areas but not stretching far at all into
rural areas (Mingat, 2003a; Moulton, 2001). Without government’s commitment to universal primary education, the per-student cost of primary education rested on an equilibrium between what governments could provide in the way of classrooms, teachers and books and what families were willing to pay in fees to give schools the operating budgets they needed. Galvanized in the 1990s by the EFA movement, several governments waived fees in an attempt to enroll all children in school. Enrollments increased dramatically but without concomitant increases in the budgets. The per-student budget, based on what funds were available, plummeted, and along with it, the availability of instructional (quality) inputs and the managerial capacity of the entire support system required to provide them.

The reforms of basic education instigated by EFA were first and foremost a response to resource constraints. Although the 1990 Jomtien declaration and plan of action emphasized the need for quality instruction, initially most support centered largely on means for enrolling more students, often in double or triple shifts, without the training of teachers and additional supplies that might negate the negative effect of these stopgap measures. Few innovations aimed to change methods of teaching and learning or the purpose of schooling. Rather, they were ways of coping with disparities between the supply and demand of schooling.

Government leadership for education reform was often inconsistent, while the capacity to design and institute fundamental changes in the primary school system remained inadequate. This constrained governments’ ability to support local communities, which rarely have the resources or the knowledge base to sustain innovations, and inhibited progress towards quality improvement on a large scale.

Central to the problem of improving education quality as enrollments grow rapidly is the role of international agencies. The UN agencies, the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and bilateral donors, which intensified the dialogue on a sustainable framework for Education for All policies in 1990, all increased their efforts to support the improvement of government policies and programs. But the dominant emphasis on the expansion of access, the relative neglect of the need to improve learning achievement, the pursuit of over-ambitious performance targets, under-estimation of capacity constraints, the absence of a sustainable financial framework and the fragmentation of external support often combined to thwart the anticipated outcomes.
The past decade has seen shifts in the strategies used by international agencies to help governments improve education quality on a large scale. Many have moved away from isolated “stove-pipe” or “Christmas tree” projects scattered throughout the education sector to projects concentrated in basic education – mostly at the primary and lower secondary levels. Since about 1997, ministries of education have moved toward the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp), with targets, indicators, and administrative procedures “harmonized” under government leadership.

The project approach and its shortcomings
Since the 1960s two kinds of international support have prevailed: World Bank and AfDB lending for projects executed by the ministry of education and bilateral grants accompanied by intensive technical assistance and equipment donations.

The banks make loans to enable ministries of education mainly to provide the “inputs” required to expand the system and improve quality – to supply textbooks, train teachers, build classrooms – and to improve the effectiveness of related processes such as curriculum development and examinations. These project inputs are treated by government as development or capital expenditures, and they are seldom transferred into the recurrent budget as sustainable operations. While the banks rely on the ministry of education to execute projects, the management unit is frequently separate from government systems. Selection of priorities for investment often reflects institutional views on education policy.

Bilateral donors and UN agencies have typically supported small-scale projects such as a group of teachers colleges or technical assistance to the inspectorate. Each donor has its own projects, which, for the most part, operate outside of government control and without much collaboration with other donor projects. Most do not advance beyond a pilot stage or are confined to limited areas of the country.

With some exceptions, the projects of international agencies have rarely contributed as expected to improving the quality of education in a systemic, sustainable manner. Funding for quality inputs and processes typically has been insufficient to sustain large-scale needs. The effectiveness of ministries has suffered from dysfunctional systems, resulting in inefficient use of funding and other resources. International support has failed to transfer capacity
and expertise to the government. Textbook supply in most countries, for example, remains at the mercy of agency funding and procurement policy. Few countries have a national textbook policy, a budget line, or efficient national procedures for procurement. As a result every textbook project is a series of events with unique procedures and ample opportunities for fraud and corruption. Fifteen years of financing and project support has only in a few countries resulted in a reliable supply of good quality textbooks to schools.

Changes in pedagogy are generally bounded as pilots and rarely integrated into the school system. Bilateral projects are labor-intensive, depending on foreign technical assistance and supervision. Technical assistants become increasingly accountable to their own governments to produce results, which often result in leaving behind ministry officials, who have no such accountability. Some innovations, such as classroom-based radio instruction, depend on economies of scale to be affordable. Yet, after the expensive piloting phase, paid for by the donors, ministries have been unable to mobilize the resources to incorporate them into the national system and sustain their benefits.

Though they recognized that poor donor and lender coordination impeded the efficiency of aid, international agencies continued to negotiate individually with ministries of education, with each donor aiming to establish a priority government support for its projects. Moreover, because they often bring clearer objectives and more resources to the table, international agencies feel strong ownership of the projects, their vision and their implementation. Ministries have not been encouraged to set priorities among piloted improvements in teaching, school management, or use of instructional technologies, for example. Ministry partners have rarely been able to be more than passive counterparts, facing multiple donor agendas and reporting systems, and donor projects that often are duplicative and even work at cross-purposes. Donor and lender projects have rarely led to synergistic improvements, as ministry officials often exhibited a preference for overseeing them separately and discouraging collaboration.

In sum, a lack of ownership, disappointing performance, and insufficient funding have resulted from the approach taken by governments and international agencies over the past few decades to improving education quality. The persisting challenge, then, is to enable the ministry of education to take more responsibility for sector development plans and to manage scarce resources in such a way as to provide systemic and system-wide support to schools for quality teaching.
The sector approach: SWAps

The recent interpretation of the EFA goal as universal “completion” of the primary cycle is placing more focus on quality issues (Bruns et al., 2003). Quality is the principal theme of the 2004 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (GMR). System-wide quality improvement is now broadly accepted as a central element of EFA strategies. The EFA concern for system-wide improvements in quality highlights the limitations of the project approach. It has brought to the fore the importance of national ownership, alignment of the objectives of different stakeholders, and the coherence of interventions and harmonization of procurement and financing mechanisms.

Toward this end, a Sector-Wide Approach is evolving as a process that produces a comprehensive sector development program and a framework for changes in the way education is financed and managed. Within this framework all significant funding for the sector supports a single sector policy and expenditure program, under government leadership, adopting common approaches across the sector, and progressing towards reliance on government procedures to disburse and account for all funds.³

The Sector-wide Approach is a process that leads to a sector development program or, in some cases, a more limited primary education sub-sector program. Of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, about 15 are active participants in SWAps. These are Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia in East Africa; Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal in West Africa, and Mozambique and Lesotho in Southern Africa. By actively engaging for several years in a SWAp, these countries have set national priorities for quality improvements in the context of the equitable distribution of sector funds. They have also committed to taking the lead in partnerships with international agencies and broadly accepted targets and strategies.

The first SWAps in Africa were initiated around 1998 in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zambia. The most consistent supporters of SWAps are the members of the group of “like-minded” European donors: DFID, Irish Aid, the Netherlands, Canada and the Nordic countries (Swedish SIDA, Norwegian NORAD, Finland’s Development Cooperation, and Danish DANIDA). AfDB, Germany, France, Japan, the European Union, and the United States support the notion of donor coordination inherent in SWAps, though to date they have – as a

³ Definition used by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
rule – not been ready to move toward a joint financing mechanism (described below). UNICEF has so far kept its funding outside of the SWAps but is considering ways to participate. The World Bank, the European Union and DFID have provided budget support in some countries.

Principal features of SWAps
The SWAp is not so much a new concept as it is an emerging operational model that exhibits definite features. Its aims are to align the objectives of international support with government priorities and to improve the coherence of international advice and financing. The principle features of a SWAp are these (Hasegawa, 2002):

- It is developed and implemented under the ownership of the recipient country.
- It includes all major donors and lenders (in fact not all SWAps include all donors and lenders, but they are all built on the belief that international agencies must work together in support of government, even though each loses some control over its own agenda and, in some cases, funding.) Accounting and reporting procedures are “harmonized,” so that the government can set goals, use indicators, and provide reports acceptable to all partners.
- It takes into account the entire education sector. This becomes more important as the shortcomings in nearly exclusive attention to primary education become more evident. Larger cohorts are completing primary school; the demand for secondary school graduates – if not tertiary graduates – to fill teaching positions becomes urgent; and the importance of early childhood education and mothers’ literacy is gaining currency. Not all SWAps, however, cover more than primary education.
- It results in and is backed by a sector development plan, an appropriate expenditure plan and calls for multi-year financial commitments from donors and lenders (though figures beyond the first year are usually provisional).
- It supports the establishment of regular review meetings attended by representatives of all stakeholders and a monitoring and evaluation system for measuring program outputs and outcomes.
- The volume of financial support is determined according to the agreed-upon factors, including the public financial gap, the amount of aid provided in the past, and the level of available domestic financial resources.
- Budget support (that is, the direct deposit of funds into the government
treasury) is considered to be the most desirable aid instrument. Budget support, however, is not essential to a SWAp and is its most resisted feature. A SWAp can also be financed by a coherent collection of projects funded by the usual mechanisms, although these arrangements are much looser and the SWAp frameworks more fragile.

**SWAPs’ contribution to quality improvements**

These features of a SWAp are expected to improve quality by, above all, changing the nature of the dialogue among government and international agencies. The process no longer supports one-on-one meetings between each agency and the ministry as the principal means of negotiating the agenda. Instead, the ministry of education, other government agencies, international agencies, and NGOs meet regularly to set priorities, discuss issues, agree upon goals, targets, and indicators, and monitor progress. As a result, the sector development program becomes more coherent and easier to sustain and manage. This benefits quality improvement programs in at least three ways.

The SWAp is expected to lead to firm agreements on increases in the overall level of national expenditures on basic education as well as allocations to quality inputs. By bringing the ministry of finance into the dialogue, government and international agencies get a more transparent and comprehensive understanding of how the education sector budget fits into the broader government budget and how all parties can adjust to ensure that priorities are addressed. Relationships between items in the development (capital) and recurrent budgets can be better rationalized, and through budget support, international funding can be used to support the recurrent as well as the development budget.

The SWAp should facilitate management reforms, principally the decentralization of basic education services. Decentralization, a process that has been occurring during the same timeframe that SWAps have evolved, requires government and its supporters to pay greater attention to the meso-level of ministry, to local governments, and to schools and the communities that support them. The SWAp permits actors in these places to engage more actively in planning. It also helps all stakeholders look together at inequities in the distribution of resources and to plan together strategies and mechanisms for addressing those inequities. This would be much more difficult in a project mode of assistance, in which each international agency is focused on limited aims and usually within limited geographic areas of the country.

4. Chapter 10 provides a more detailed discussion of decentralization issues.
The SWAp is also intended to improve joint monitoring of quality-enhancing inputs and processes through common assessments of their impact on learning achievement. Looking at an agreed-upon set of indicators and measures of progress, SWAp participants engage in dialogue on what is working well and what needs to be given more attention. This should help the ministry develop a coherent view of priorities, trade-offs and implementation sequencing.

**Experience relevant to improving quality**

With roughly five years of experience in a growing number of countries, what has been learned about the effectiveness of SWAps in helping governments make systemic, large-scale, and sustained improvements in the quality of education? While there are no quantified data that demonstrate direct relationships between SWAp activities and improvements in student achievement (or other indicators of improved quality), there is some evidence of the effectiveness of SWAps in leading toward quality improvements, however indirect. The following findings come from a study of Mozambique’s SWAp sponsored by ADEA (Takala *et al.*, 2003), analyses of SWAps by the British Overseas Development Institute (Brown *et al.*, 2001), the *Joint Evaluation of External Support to Basic Education in Developing Countries* (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003), a review of the World Bank’s experience with improving quality in Africa (Moulton, 2003a), and a SIDA analysis of SWAps (Ridell *et al.*, 2000). These studies look at SWAps across Africa, though the bulk of information is on Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zambia.

**Ownership.** With better cooperation among donors and a concerted effort to help governments set priorities and implement them, ministries of education are taking a stronger lead in achieving objectives. In some countries, however, there is a perception that international agencies are still in control of targets and of priorities. Primary education continues to dominate the agenda in each SWAp country, even though governments face political pressure to increase public resource allocations to other parts of the sector.

**Harmonization of administrative procedures.** This has proved easiest to achieve in four areas: (i) reporting format, (ii) common performance indicators, (iii) joint missions, and (iv) procedures and norms for technical assistance. Harmonization is most difficult to achieve in (i) procurement and (ii) financial management (Ridell *et al.*, 2000). Altogether, there have been limited gains in harmonization. (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003).
Links to government’s budgeting process. The SWAp process has encouraged ministries of education to work more closely with ministries in finance in analyzing education’s share of the total government budget. A particularly useful tool for this analysis is the medium-term (three-year) expenditure framework, which helps both ministries and international agencies share a picture of projected costs and policy options (Ridell et al., 2000).

The link between policy and implementation. “In countries using a SWAp, there is a clearer potential link between policy and implementation than was evident in the project world, in which government strategies were dependent on fragmented donor projects to implement them… The need for time to prepare and agree policies, and to adapt and modify them over time, argues for creating strong policy analysis capacity within government, linked to effective processes for linking analysis to decision-making and to execution” (Foster, 2000). Agreement among ministries and agencies on objectives and targets is making conflicts more manageable than in contexts where there is no such explicit agreement.

Successes
In spite of their relative newness, there have been some notable successes in improving quality system-wide that are closely linked to SWAp.

Sector-wide reform. Mauritania’s ministry of education has taken the lead in a participatory and iterative sector planning process during which participants were asked to set priorities under increasingly tight budget constraints. The process, which has taken place in close dialogue with its major international partners, is grounded in considerable analytical work, and it has continued during implementation. Quality issues are being addressed in a sequence that reflects financial and capacity constraints.

Additional resources to schools. Tanzania, Uganda and Guinea have found ways to get more resources to schools by giving small grants based on student enrollments. These direct allocations allow schools to purchase instructional and other school supplies. The important success of this quality-improvement measure is that the funds actually reach schools. In Uganda, the amounts and channels of disbursements are publicized, so that the success (or failure) of their transfer through banks is apparent to everyone.

Pilots taken to scale. In Zambia, the Primary Reading Program, a project supported by the DFID that pre-dated the SWAp, was “taken under its umbrella,”
so the project personnel were able to build good working relationships with the ministry. The project went to a larger scale and was even coordinated with other ministry functions, including curriculum revision. (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003). Guinea has incorporated a system-wide innovation in teacher training. A reform of the structure of pre-service training has resulted in a dramatic increase in the output of teachers from colleges without any negative impact on student learning. Mali is expanding its Pédagogie Convergente program in the context of a ten-year sector development program supported by all major donors. The program integrates a national language instruction activity that has been piloted and nurtured for many years and pedagogical innovations introduced in NGO-supported community schools into the basic instructional system. Uganda launched a Teacher Development and Management System (TDMS) that now covers the entire country (see Box 4.1).

Issues
Though none of these findings reveal an improvement in education quality as a direct result of the SW Ap, taken together they give a picture of the transfer of responsibility and initiative away from international agencies and to governments. Thus, they show a break from the mold of separate and dispersed projects that have little promise of large-scale, sustained improvements. Insofar as they have begun to help ministry systems function better and in alignment with the larger government finance and budgeting system, SW Aps are laying the indispensable foundation for policies that reflect budget constraints and are managed in a manner that holds government as well as international agencies accountable for results. As long as policies promote quality, as well as access and equity, the link between a SW Ap and improved quality should become stronger. Yet SW Aps are still nascent and should be considered more of a potential than an unequivocal demonstration of improvements in quality. A number of important issues remain to be resolved.

Budget support? This is the most questioned aspect of a SW Ap. At one end of the spectrum, the like-minded group of donors is committed to budgetary support, channeling funds through the government’s treasury. At present while some of these donors provide budget support in several countries, most prefer at this point to pool funding in a “basket,” which is managed by the ministry of education and monitored by one of the agencies. While some of the other bilateral agencies and multi lateral agencies sometimes also provide budget support through separate funding arrangements, still others continue
Box 4.1. The development of a SWAp in Uganda

The development of a SWAp in Uganda has been a major force in improving the quality of a primary education system that doubled in enrollments during one year. In 1993 Uganda began a series of quality-oriented reforms, including a gradual ten-fold raise in teachers’ salaries, liberalization of the textbook market, revisions of the curriculum and examinations, and a teacher development system. The Teacher Development and Management System provided in-service training to unqualified teachers, professional support to all teachers, and a rationalization and changes in the pre-service network of teachers colleges that brought them into synch with the other reforms. The TDMS also strengthened the capacity of district education offices and gave parents and communities an important role in monitoring and supporting schools.

These reforms were still progressing slowly from pilots in two districts when, in 1997, President Museveni effectively abolished school fees, resulting in an explosive growth in enrollment, from 2.6 million in 1993 to 5.2 million in 1997 (climbing to 7.2 million in 2003). The challenge facing the government – and landing directly on the shoulders of the Ministry of Education and Sports – was to catch up in quality reforms with the huge leap in enrollments. Grade 1 and 2 classrooms holding 90 or 100 students were not uncommon; teachers were overwhelmed, and textbooks were in short supply. In addition, the HIV/AIDS scourge was decimating the ranks of teachers and other ministry staff.

The international community responded to the crisis with increased funding. The USAID, which had supported the quality reforms from 1993 on, were joined by British, Irish, Dutch, and other aid agencies. Perhaps more important than their funding pledges was the agreement among donors and lenders to collaborate in a SWAp to support the new Education Sector Investment Program (ESIP). The SWAp benefited from effective leadership within the ministry, which, by 1998, was convening semi-annual sector program reviews attended by representatives of all stakeholders, including non-government organizations. A key component of the SWAp was the active engagement of the ministries of finance and public service, which enabled participants in the process to develop as a three-year annual rolling Medium Term Expenditure Framework (METF) that meshed with the ministry of finance’s larger budget framework, and to recruit and pay many more teachers within the civil service structure. The ESIP and the METF thus provided everyone with a clear picture of priorities and trade-offs and paved the way for consensus on targets and a means for monitoring progress.

Had Uganda not instigated a SWAp, the TDMS might have been crushed by enrollment numbers overwhelming its still-fragile structure, and a bombardment of uncoordinated donor projects might have paralyzed the ministry. Instead, the ministry took the lead in coordinating all players, prioritizing problems and goals, and allocating resources. Improvements in the country’s macroeconomic situation and available funds, increases in foreign grants and loans, and proportionally larger allocations to primary education helped the government raise per-pupil expenditures from $2.86 in 1993 to $19.00 in 2001.

Though quality “inputs” are still unacceptably low, with pupil teacher ratios at 54 to 1 and textbooks at 5 to 1 in lower primary, the SWAp process provides assurance that the partnership of government and international agencies will continue to address problems collaboratively and within a sector-wide framework.
exclusively with project support. In most countries budget support and basket funding are still a small portion of funding and a fragile mechanism. While budget support represents a considerable step toward government ownership of sector activities, it is not critical to the successful functioning of a SWAp.

**Hampering grassroots innovations?** One country report (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003) notes “the shift to sector-wide support has possibly had a negative effect on opportunities for external agencies to support capacity building at decentralized levels. Innovative projects that support direct activities have all but disappeared, resulting in fewer opportunities for projects that favor grassroots innovation, local empowerment and capacity building.”

This trend is a result of the reduction in funds for smaller-scale projects of bilateral agencies. Particularly in light of increasing decentralization of basic education services, ignoring the need for continuing support to small-scale innovations would result in throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The challenge for SWAp participants is to facilitate governments’ piloting and analysis of alternative innovations in pedagogy, program strategies, and delivery systems.

**Trade-off between system building and equity targeting?** The initial stages of a SWAp have in some countries led to a trade-off between two legitimate priorities: extending coverage of basic services as cost-effectively as possible, and including groups who are outside the mainstream as a result of gender, poverty, geography, or disability. As discussed in *Chapter 3*, the cost of reaching marginalized children is often higher than that of reaching those who can afford to pay, who have easy access to a school, and whom society considers deserving of an education (Foster, 2000). Yet the SWAp process provides a better forum for discussion of priorities and trade-offs than the project approach does, and over time SWAp partners should be able to balance interests and agree on priorities.

**Skill sets of international agencies?** As bilateral agencies move away from technical support to projects, which has primarily entailed expertise in pedagogy and instruction, to a role of analyzing policies and monitoring progress, a different set of skills may be needed. These center on “sector-wide analysis, policy formulation and planning, and negotiation and require a greater understanding of the ‘politics’ of external agency coordination. Yet these are not part of the traditional skills of education section experts in external agencies at the
country level.” Some see in SWAps an increase in the role and influence of the World Bank, partly because the bilateral agencies and UN agencies do not always have policy-formulation and planning skills. In Mozambique, some ministry staff members perceive “expertise imbalances among international staff or consultants fielded by the agencies. In general, field staff in bilateral agencies are not well prepared to handle the level of sophistication on the basis of which procedures are negotiated and defined. There are perceptions on the Mozambican side that the multilaterals, particularly the World Bank, field seasoned experts with whom the representatives of the bilaterals cannot genuinely negotiate… Many expressed high regard for the pool of expertise available from the World Bank… By contrast, the expertise available from some bilateral agencies was deemed less useful and in some cases even deficient in terms of a working partnership” (Takala et al., 2003). SWAp participants are beginning the process of adjusting to these new requirements, but no clear patterns have emerged yet.

**Complementing SWAps:**

**NGOs and poverty reduction strategies**

Alongside emerging SWAps, two important trends are influencing education sector development programs. These are (i) the growing influence of NGOs and civil society and (ii) the supportive macroeconomic context of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs). In very different ways, both NGOs and PRSs are complementing the work of SWAps in addressing quality improvement.

**NGOs and civil society**

International NGOs (such as *Aide et Action*, British Action Aid, CARE, and Save the Children) and national or local NGOs are funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies, by churches and other religious organizations, and by individual contributors, especially those living in North America and Europe. In earlier decades, each NGO had its own agenda, for which it raised funding and worked independently. Most worked in the most disadvantaged communities in Africa with “the poorest of the poor.” Through decades of experience in the most challenging communities, many NGOs have gained a reputation for high-quality education programs, albeit on a small scale.

Although many of the large NGOs attended the Jomtien Conference in 1990, it was not until the Dakar meeting in 2000 that they organized and presented
a formal statement on NGOs’ support to Education for All. In the context of EFA, the programs of many NGOs have since become more closely aligned with those of international funding agencies, and as a result, with those of governments, even though their support is almost exclusively on non-government, or non-formal, programs. This has happened as government efforts have begun to reach the remote communities in which NGOs work. Respectively, as some NGOs became more visible, with their success in supporting community schools and out-of-school programs, governments and international agencies view them increasingly as competent partners in implementing projects. For example, the government of Mali eventually extended payment of teachers’ salaries and books to community schools that had been created and supported by Save the Children.

NGOs are generally viewed not only as serving communities that government does not reach but also as representing the interests of civil society. This happens more at local-level than at central-level forums, though in some countries NGOs have participated in the SWAp process and had a strong voice in the regular national reviews of sector development programs.

Although respect for NGO work in education has grown in most of Africa, there continues to be a wide range of government policies and attitudes toward them. Ethiopia, for example, forbade NGOs to operate in the sector for many years, though this has now changed. At the other extreme, Senegal now contracts with NGOs to provide education services, particularly in adult literacy (Chapter 9). Guinea NGOs manage community construction, support community schooling, and implement in-service teacher training programs. In Tanzania, one NGO has played the key role in analyzing basic education policies and financing. National chapters of the Forum on African Women’s Education (FAWE) have played an advocacy role in a number of countries. Altogether, NGOs and civil society have become much more active in the education sector and, more particularly, in the policy dialogue.

Yet as international agencies shift more of their financial support to government budgets, NGOs have expressed concern that a full-scale shift would hamper efforts to strengthen civil society – non-government players (Swift, 2000). “There is a tendency for the dialogue surrounding the development, implementation and assessment of large-scale programs of support to basic education to be conducted on a narrow basis, without effective participation by civil society organizations and key stakeholder groups such as teachers. This
has the effect of alienating key groups necessary to the success of programs and may undermine the level of political support and community commitment available to sustain the subsequent program” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003).

Representatives of teachers, NGOs, communities, and even smaller aid agencies are in many instances still marginalized. As long as this condition persists, smaller groups are likely to continue with their own projects, without much hope that they will be recognized beyond limited communities. At worse, if funding for such projects is diverted full-scale to central government systems, the sources of innovative improvements in quality will dry up. NGOs have offered a great deal to improvements in quality through their small-scale projects, and those SWAps that foster their continued participation have much to gain. It will be important to recognize the importance of such innovations in the SWAp process and ensure that education development programs provide for financing through “innovation funds” or targeted funding allocations.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

Based on evidence that, with the right policies and strategies, poverty in Africa and other parts of the developing world can be reduced significantly (Collier and Dollar, 1999), the World Bank has during the past few years based many of its country lending programs on national Poverty Reduction Strategies. The World Bank and IMF work with the government to prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

The PRSP in each country is an analysis of the specific factors contributing to poverty, an action plan, and a set of indicators of progress toward goals. It is underpinned by detailed sector strategies prepared through similar but separate processes. The PRSP is linked to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the second of which is “to achieve universal primary education.”

The PRS process offers significant support to education sector programs. First, because of the link in the MDGs and PRSP between poverty and low education attainment, the PRS process provides financial resources for education sector development programs. Second, in line with the EFA’s growing emphasis on education quality – as well as access – the MDG indicators used to measure progress in education cover not only enrollment but also completion and literacy rates.
Third, as the PRSP is a comprehensive approach to economic development, the education sector budget is placed in the context of all national development plans. The targets of the education sector plan and their resource implications are summarized in an expenditure program that is consistent with the government’s medium-term expenditure framework and the longer-term macroeconomic framework embedded in the PRSP. Sector development plans in this context are no longer the wish list of the ministry of education supported by the sympathetic sector specialists of international agencies, but part and parcel of the national macro-economic policy and resource framework.

Finally, the effectiveness of SWAps has in some instances been constrained by the limited authority that ministries of education have over the resources they need to fulfill their functions. Teachers are usually paid by the ministry of finance or another ministry, and the broader regulatory environment affects the flow of resources. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) are expected to help ministries of education overcome these limitations.

The World Bank has prepared an Education Chapter in the PRSP Sourcebook as a guide for developing the education policy component of a PRSP. It provides “diagnostic tools and research findings that can help countries identify the policies and programs likely to have the most powerful impact on education opportunities and outcomes for poor children and illiterate adults within their country context.”

To date, fifteen governments have submitted PRSPs to the World Bank, and many others have completed Interim PRSPs. Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda finalized their papers two or more years ago. The reviews of how well the PRS is delivering on its potential are mixed. Drawing on a wide range of assessments, IMF/World Bank reports (International Development Association and International Monetary Fund, 2002a and 2002b) conclude that the PRS process is helping to put governments “in the driver’s seat” in planning and implementing poverty-reduction programs. The increased competence of key ministries, such as finance and planning, is expected to be a great help to line ministries, including education, in developing and implementing feasible policies and programs. In contrast, the Joint Evaluation found that line ministries are only marginally involved in the PRS process and that many education sectors still do not use an MTEF (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2003). Finally, it is important to note that the usefulness of the PRS in improving education quality will depend,
above all, on the quality and credibility of the sector development program. This increasingly close link between sector and macro policies is both an opportunity and a challenge for staff in the ministry of education. It creates the opportunity to strengthen the link between policy and resources and it often results in additional resources for the sector. At the same time the technical demands of resource and evidence based planning that are inherent in this process are unfamiliar to many staff in the education ministries and have created new demands for capacity building.

Conclusions
The growing experience with SWAps to overcome the limitations of the project approach to improving education quality on a large scale is promising but still uncertain. On the positive side, the SWAp, as well as the PRS, strongly encourage ownership of the planning and implementation processes by government and active participation of other stakeholders in these processes. In letting go of these responsibilities, international agencies give governments much more opportunity to coordinate their functions, manage their resources, and discipline their staffs. Progress along these lines is essential if ministries of education are to continually improve and sustain improvements in the quality of education. Without capable systems in place, ministries will be unable to incorporate small-scale pilots and sustain large-scale services in an adaptable and flexible manner that responds to local needs and differences.

On the negative side, the gap between theory and practice is still highly visible: SWAps appear still to be driven too much by the goals, values, and practices of international agencies. Ministries of education have often not fully seized the opportunities that the PRS process offers. Although it may be only a matter of time before this changes, governments and international agencies must continue to make a conscious effort to encourage practices that put ownership of planning and implementation into the hands of those responsible for success. The increasingly active participation of NGOs and the civil society they represent is also critical to the success of the SWAp.