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

This booklet is a summary of The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book was commissioned by ADEA for discussion at its 2003 Biennial Meeting.

All countries of sub-Saharan Africa reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of learning and completion of basic education for all at the World Education Forum in Dakar. Yet, even after considerable efforts, most education systems in the region are far from reaching these goals. The challenge remains daunting. In most countries less than one third of the children of school age acquire the knowledge and the skills specified in their national primary education curricula. The book argues that meeting the challenge of EFA means addressing the twin challenges of quality and equity. It also explores how the countries of sub-Saharan Africa can do this in a financially viable way.

The book is based on 22 country case studies documenting experiences with quality improvement programs in Africa, forty background papers and a review of unpublished African literature. It summarizes research findings on quality and quality improvement, equity and gender and documents changes in the way external agencies help countries make progress towards the EFA goals. It reviews experiences in sub-Saharan Africa related to the following issues: investments in inputs that are most cost-effective, curriculum reforms to enhance relevance, changes in instructional strategies and teacher development to improve school effectiveness, differentiation of programs and diversification of providers to improve equity of results. It explores how the emphasis on quality and equity affect the way education systems are financed and managed, and students’ learning progress is measured and monitored. Finally, it provides a strategic framework for quality improvement.

Education specialists from Africa and its development partners wrote the different chapters. Adriaan Verspoor, a senior education consultant with broad experience in Africa, led the team and edited the book.

The Editor

Adriaan Verspoor is an independent consultant specializing in policy analysis and the design and management of education development programs. From 1976 to 2000 he was at the World Bank, where he held positions in different parts of the institution, including the Africa region where he worked as a task team leader and manager from 1976 to 1984 and as a regional education lead specialist from 1998-2000.

Since his retirement from the World Bank in 2000, Mr. Verspoor has worked as a consultant for ADEA, the World Bank, DFID, ADB and the Netherlands. He continues to be involved in education development in Africa.

Mr. Verspoor has co-authored several books and articles on a wide range of issues in education development. He was trained as a primary school teacher before completing graduate work in development economics at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.
The Challenge of Learning: 
Improving the Quality of Basic Education in sub-Saharan Africa
This booklet is a summary of *The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, a document commissioned by ADEA for its study on the quality of education undertaken in 2002-2003.

The views and opinions expressed in this volume are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ADEA, to its members or affiliated organizations, or to any individual acting on behalf of ADEA.

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Summary

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Adriaan M. Verspoor
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The book is the product of the work of a taskforce on education quality established by ADEA in 2002. Adriaan Verspoor proposed the concept and the research questions, provided technical and editorial support to all contributors and was responsible for the final editorial review and the summary. Charlotte Sedel coordinated the efforts of the many people involved in the preparation of more than 3000 pages of background documents.

The book is based on 22 detailed country case studies, eight papers from ADEA Working Groups and 33 background papers by education specialists. The titles and the authors of these reports are listed in Annex 1 of the book. The country cases were selected to address four issues with the support of education specialists as indicated below. For each theme a synthesis was prepared by the thematic coordinator(s) responsible for that theme.

Drawing on these and other analyses the chapters of the book were prepared by Martial Dembele, Vincent Greaney, Thomas Kellaghan, Jeanne Moulton, Alain Mingat, Jordan Naidoo, Mamadou Ndoye, John Oxenham, Jane Schubert, Charlotte Sedel, Bart van Uythem and Adriaan Verspoor with the support of the ADEA editorial team.

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 members at a meeting in Chantilly (October 26, 2002), (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-Georges (June 30 to July 3, 2003); and (iii) the participants who attended ADEA’s 2003 Biennial meeting.
The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

The quest for quality: a daunting challenge

The achievement of learning and completion of basic Education for All is a central objective of education policy in sub-Saharan Africa, to which all countries of the region committed themselves in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar. The challenge implicit in this commitment is daunting, probably unprecedented. Even after considerable efforts to expand access, most education systems in the region are far from reaching the Dakar goals. Unless the increase in admissions in grade 1 is followed by improvements in quality and retention, the human resource base for sustained development will remain unacceptably weak. Less than one-third of the children of school-leaving age currently have the knowledge and the skills specified in their national primary education curriculum. This jeopardizes the very objectives of economic development, social progress and peace and democracy that are at the core of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The quest for quality is not just an issue of education policy but a key development challenge.

The challenge of learning for all

A large number of children on the continent remain out-of-school (Graph 1). The gross enrollment ratio of sub-Saharan Africa stood at 81.2% in 2000, lower than any other region in the world.

Of the 115 million children of school age not enrolled in school, 42 million, or 35%, live in sub-Saharan Africa, which contains only 10% of the world’s population. Enrolling these children represents a major challenge for poor African countries. But with a gross intake rate of more than 95% the challenge has rapidly become one of quality and retention rather than of initial access. 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 emphasized, much of the EFA effort might be wasted. Wasted because impor-
tant 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.

**Graph 1. Distribution of out-of-school children in the world**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America/Western Europe</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Asia</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States/North Africa</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNESCO 2002

Of the children who enroll in grade 1, less than two-thirds reach the final grade, and of these only about half can demonstrate that they master the expected basic skills and knowledge. As a result, more than two out of every three children of primary-school-leaving age in sub-Saharan Africa enter the labor market with, at best, limited literacy and numeracy skills. The low level of education of the labor force constrains prospects for international competitiveness, economic growth and social development in many countries on the continent.

The concerns about the quality of schooling are also apparent when the literacy levels of adults who attended school when they were young are examined. Six years of primary education should enable those who complete to be literate in the long term. Yet, the performance of school systems varies considerably in this regard. **Graph 2** summarizes the available data. They reflect the learning of people who attended primary school in the 1980s, as it is based on the reported literacy of adults whose average age is a little over 30. The data suggest that (i) time spent in school is a fundamental ingredient for learning, and (ii) the productivity of this time can vary greatly depending on how efficiently it is used.
An incomplete transition to mass education

Clearly, most African education systems today do not deliver the knowledge, skills and attitudes that parents want and society expects. The causes are multiple and need to be considered in their historical context. At independence countries inherited education systems designed to educate a small elite group of children. The resource parameters of this high cost/low coverage system precluded its linear expansion; major changes were required to transform it into an effective mass education system. This transition has been completed in some countries but remains a work in progress in many others. Moreover, increasingly ambitious objectives of mass education evolving from equal opportunity to enroll universal completion and learning achievement, have added to the challenge. Industrialized countries have struggled with these goals for more than half a century. Sub-Saharan Africa faces them in an environment of slow economic growth, major public health challenges caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a persistence of conflict and civil strife in many countries and capacity for policy and program implementation that remains insufficient for the task.

But clearly, there is no choice: The challenge of quality in basic education must be addressed without delay. Already the Jomtien Conference in 1990 concluded that educational reforms should focus their efforts on “real learning achievement and on outcomes rather than exclusively on school enrollment”
(UNESCO, 1990). The World Education Forum that took place in Dakar, in 2000 reasserted the commitment 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.

**Equity means quality for all**
Basic education policy therefore is not only confronted with a challenge of quality but also with one of equity, 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 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, concern the equality of results measured by academic success. As a consequence the indicator of progress towards Education for All moved from a gross enrollment ratio of 100%, to a net enrollment ratio of 100%, and then to a primary school completion ratio of 100%. Even more demanding is the expectation that students who complete primary education master the skills and knowledge specified in the national curriculum. The latter perspective focuses on the inequalities of results and postulates that all students must have access to the opportunities to learn and pedagogic support that are necessary for them to attain at least the expected basic level of competence at the end of their schooling.

**Conflicts and HIV/AIDS add to the challenge**
The challenge has become even more daunting as sub-Saharan countries suffer the consequences of conflict and HIV/AIDS. Conflicts usually have a severe negative impact on education. Often hundreds of thousands of people are internally displaced or become refugees, adding to the education challenges faced by the host country. Buildings are frequently damaged or destroyed; textbooks and instructional material also risk being spoiled. Parents and children are strongly marked by the violence that they have seen or experienced. Ministries of education are often poorly prepared to face the challenge of rebuilding, once peace returns.
The HIV/AIDS pandemic has stricken 28.5 million adults and children. HIV/AIDS has a serious negative impact on the ability of teachers to carry out their work with the expected regularity. It also affects students’ ability to attend school and learn, especially those who are HIV positive, live with sick people or whose parents or guardians have died of the disease. 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 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 have most likely 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. The most effective programs to fight HIV/AIDS have several essential parts: an evaluation of the prevalence of the risk; education for prevention; voluntary screening; counseling and establishing support groups; redeployment and transfers of staff; hiring replacement teachers; medical care (including making antiretroviral drugs available); and fighting against discrimination.

The study

To stimulate discussion and reflection, ADEA selected the issue of “quality in basic education” as the central theme for its Biennial Meeting in 2003 and established an ad-hoc group to investigate the following question:

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

The methodology was based on the praxis approach that was adopted for earlier work of ADEA, characterized by “learning through action, learning from action to develop and improve action.” This approach emphasizes 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 strengthening of institutional and technical capacities for the continuous improvement of the quality of education. This interactive process of learning assumes that each country learns from its own policies and actions by evaluating them and sharing the lessons
with others in the region so that successful and/or promising experiences in improving the quality of basic education may be identified and analyzed.

The 22 case studies carried out by country teams are the foundation of the analysis. Most ADEA Working Groups contributed background papers grounded in their experience. Education specialists were invited to write background papers. In addition, reviews of the African literature done by the researchers of the regional networks (ROCARE and ERNESA) were commissioned. These supporting documents have made it possible to add to the findings of the case studies and place them in a much broader context of the African and international experience.
Improving Quality: What Do We Know?

Quality is a multi-faceted concept. Most definitions highlight the different elements of the basic input-process-output model that commonly underpins education research and policy analysis (UNESCO, 2002). The analyses in this book have been guided by a concept of quality that emphasizes cognitive and affective results (mediated by quality inputs and processes) that are measured by the extent to which pupils achieve the knowledge, skills and behaviors specified in a national curriculum.

School effectiveness and school improvement

Three decades of research and evaluation from a variety of complementary perspectives provide several lenses through which quality may be viewed. The aim is to understand and ascribe meaning to education policy and practice designed to increase the effectiveness of teaching and enhance learning achievement or both. Scheerens (2000) compiled evidence from industrialized countries on the findings of this research. Table 1 summarizes the most important of the 14 factors that he found to be positively linked to effectiveness.

School improvement research has investigated how and under what conditions improvement in school effectiveness can be brought about and has produced broad agreement on the key factors of school improvement, such as leadership, staff cooperation, and achievement oriented school policies (Hopkins, 2001).

An important conclusion is that the most effective measures to favor students from disadvantaged milieus are found directly in schools and classrooms, particularly in those that focus on the acquisition of basic skills and use direct instruction. Research findings in developing countries are largely similar, while finding that school factors – in particular the provision of basic resources – make a much greater difference. But, at the same time, it has become quite clear that providing basic resources and knowing which factors enhance student learning does not automatically result in effective use or translate into changes in instructional practice. An important further insight is the recognition that changes in teaching and learning in the classroom not only
involves teachers’ behaviors but also their beliefs (Fullan, 2000). The lessons for lasting school improvement are these:

• 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.

Table 1. Key factors of educational effectiveness

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

The equitable distribution of opportunities to learn has become an international, universally agreed goal driving national policy and action. Quality has thus become inextricably linked with equity.

The major correlates of education disadvantage
Recent analyses confirm that poverty, rural residence and gender persist as the strongest correlates of school attendance and performance (Table 2). The impact of poverty on enrollment, retention and completion is particularly striking. Whereas almost seven out of every ten students from the wealthiest families complete successfully, fewer than three out of ten from the poorest families do so. The second most important variable is whether a child lives in an urban or rural area. The impact of these two variables is exacerbated for girls. Overall, only one girl in three is likely to complete primary school, compared with one out of every two boys. Among the girls from the poorest rural locations, only one in five is likely to do so.

Poor quality instruction is very likely the strongest explanation for the failure of students to acquire the expected knowledge and skills and pass examinations, and is therefore an important source of inequity. To address the problems of access and quality for the rural poor, in particular poor rural girls, marked priority will have to be given to examining the obstacles and possible inequities that affect that population.
Table 2. Social disparities 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, 2003

Box 1: Educating Maasai girls in Kajiado

In workshops for the local chiefs, FAWE ensured that “the issues of outdated cultural practices of early marriages and pregnancies which hinder girls’ education were voiced. Other problems identified were lack of community awareness on the importance of education, specifically that of girls, and lack of community mobilization and participation in the process of educational planning and implementation within their localities.” Concomitant with these challenges to custom and culture were measures for reconciliation and healing: the chiefs undertook to see that the girls who had rebelled against an early marriage because they wanted their education first would be reconciled with their families.

While demand factors may play a role in causing this gender disparity – see for instance FAWE’s involvement with the Maasai communities of the Kajiado district in Kenya (Box 1) – improving female enrollment rates in many African countries should be possible, as experiences in Asia and Latin
America have demonstrated. In seven sub-Saharan countries girls are more likely to be in school, and in nine there is no statistically significant effect of gender on school attendance. This suggests that under the right conditions the impediments to girls’ education will give way. Identifying those conditions and taking corrective action is the policy challenge.

Changes in international support
Following the 1990 Jomtien Conference, bilateral and multi lateral aid agencies increased their efforts to support basic education programs and policy reform. But the dominant emphasis on the expansion of access, and the relative neglect of the need to improve learning achievement, the pursuit of over-ambitious performance targets, the 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, especially in quality improvement.

The Sector-Wide Approach
In response, a Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) is emerging as a process that produces a comprehensive sector development program providing coherence to the support of international funding agencies – and increasingly also NGOs – and government funding priorities. Within this framework all significant funding for the sector supports a single sector policy and expenditure program, linked to government’s budgeting process, under government leadership, adopting common approaches across the sector, and progressing towards reliance on government procedures to disburse and account for all funds. Of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, about 15 are currently active participants in SWAps. These countries have set national priorities for quality improvements in the context of the equitable distribution of sector funds. They are also taking the lead in partnerships with international agencies based on broadly accepted targets and strategies.

SWAps are helping to overcome the limitations of the project approach. The initial results are promising but still uncertain. The analytical underpinnings of sector reforms have been strengthened, participation and consultation are becoming a part of the policy development process, and the link between policy and implementation has been strengthened. SWAps have created an environment that allows explicit consideration of intra- and inter-sectoral trade-
offs, channeling resources directly to schools (e.g., Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Guinea) and scaling-up of pilots programs (Zambia, Guinea and Mali). Finally, as governments aim to reach people in remote areas, NGOs are being considered increasingly as effective operational partners.

But important challenges remain. First, governments will need to extend the partnership beyond the major financing agencies and ensure opportunities for meaningful participation throughout the processes of program design, review and implementation for all national and international stakeholders. Second, sector development programs will need to make explicit provision for mechanisms to support innovation and experimentation. Finally, financing arrangements will need to be flexible so that different legal and institutional constraints of major financial partners can be accommodated. SWAPs vary considerably in the way they address these and other challenges. In fact, one of the strengths of the approach is the flexibility to take into account the various ambitions and constraints of the partners.

Promising avenues and blind alleys
The financial challenge implicit in the EFA targets is considerable. Allocating resources efficiently, that is, to those inputs that are associated with enhanced learning achievement at an affordable cost, will be imperative. Research has explored the impact of school- and out-of-school factors on student learning. Findings suggest that:

- The **academic level of teachers** has variable effects; more than 10 years of general education may not have much impact on student learning.
- Short **initial training** accompanied by school-level support for beginning teachers can be as effective as long pre-service training.
- **In-service teacher** training, as currently practiced, does not appear to have much impact.
- **One book per pupil** in core subjects is likely to enhance learning achievement significantly.
- **Double-shift** systems are almost always detrimental to learning; **multi-grade** classrooms usually have no negative impact and can encourage significant improvements in instructional practice.
- Girls drop out less often when they have **female teachers**.
- **Class size** up to 60 does not appear to affect student learning significantly.
- **School lunches** mostly have a positive impact on student attendance.
- **Pre-school attendance** is likely to have a positive impact on student learning.
• **Time available for learning** has an important impact on achievement.
• **Repetition** of a grade rarely has a lasting effect on student learning and is correlated with a high drop-out rate.

But all of these factors only have a limited explanatory power, although in developing countries they explain much more than the 10-15% of the variation that is commonly found in industrialized country settings. The residual is probably related to the way resources are used. Moreover, it is the relationship between the cost and the impact on learning of a particular variable that determines its cost-effectiveness, as illustrated in the table below. Low cost and high effectiveness interventions are the promising avenues that policy makers may wish to consider rather than the low effectiveness or high cost/high effectiveness interventions of the blind alleys (*Table 3*).

**Table 3. Cost-effectiveness of education policies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Promising Avenue</th>
<th>Blind Alley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>• Bilingual programs using African languages as medium of instruction in early grades&lt;br&gt;• Content organized in a limited number of subject&lt;br&gt;• Direct instruction with supporting structured materials</td>
<td>• “Colonial” languages throughout the cycle&lt;br&gt;• Discovery learning and open-ended instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning materials</td>
<td>• A textbook in core subjects for every child&lt;br&gt;• Notebook and other supplies&lt;br&gt;• Sundry classroom supplies&lt;br&gt;• Teacher guides&lt;br&gt;• Classroom library</td>
<td>• Computers in classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>• 900 hours of instruction&lt;br&gt;• Regular teacher presence&lt;br&gt;• Arrangements for substitute teaching</td>
<td>• Double-shift use of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>• Community managed classroom construction&lt;br&gt;• Double-shift use of classrooms</td>
<td>• National competitive bidding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and schools</td>
<td>• Continuous in-service training and support&lt;br&gt;• Distance education for teachers&lt;br&gt;• Female teachers&lt;br&gt;• School-based management&lt;br&gt;• Training head teachers as instructional and transformational leaders&lt;br&gt;• Support by pedagogical counselors</td>
<td>• Lengthy pre-service training&lt;br&gt;• Centralized management&lt;br&gt;• Traditional inspections&lt;br&gt;• Subject matter teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>• Community-provided school lunches&lt;br&gt;• Community managed ECD and pre-school programs&lt;br&gt;• School health (micro nutrients and parasites)</td>
<td>• Services provided by central government agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>• School management committees with authority on resource allocation and school organization&lt;br&gt;• Adult basic education</td>
<td>• Responsibility without resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Without essential inputs little learning will take place. But ultimately it is the combination of inputs and processes – an appropriate curriculum, competent teachers, effective instructional strategies and supportive school environments – that will result in high learning achievement. The most critical policy challenge for most countries is ensuring the presence of competent teachers in sufficient numbers. The need for new teachers will be very large during the next decade, while public resources to sustain a concomitant growth in the salary bill are likely to be limited. Unsurprisingly, in many countries major changes have taken place and are still taking place in the composition of the teaching force and in the organization of teacher training. Volunteers and contract teachers already outnumber the civil service teachers in several countries.

Recent research evidence from the Programme d’analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC)\(^1\) studies suggests that much of the conventional wisdom guiding policies on teacher recruitment and training may need to be reexamined, specifically for beliefs that higher levels of student learning are associated with:

- General education qualifications beyond the BEPC (Brevet d’études du premier cycle);
- Long pre-service training; and
- Higher teacher salaries and secure employment.

These findings need to be confirmed, further analyzed, fine-tuned and the policy implications considered carefully as countries formulate national policies for teacher recruitment and deployment as part of their quest to ensure quality education for all children.

### A relevant curriculum that prepares for the future

A relevant curriculum is one that connects learning to the child’s experience and environment, makes learning meaningful, responds to parental expectations and demands, and at the same time prepares students not only for today’s world but also for society as it will develop in the next fifty years. In a rapidly changing globalized world that demands a capacity for adaptation and innovation to pursue social and professional mobility and to invent new solutions for new situations, one of the most essential characteristics of a relevant curricu-

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lum is its flexibility (i.e., its openness and adaptability to both the needs of the local context and development for the future). To meet these aims, curricula reforms need to:

- Relate to the purposes of education, and introduce (pre) professionalization and productive/manual work, environmental and health education;
- Introduce African languages as the language of instruction;
- Improve instructional effectiveness and student learning through innovations, such as competency-based curricula and child-centered instruction;
- Improve the organization and management of classes and student numbers, especially through multi-grade and double-shift systems.

The evidence on the effectiveness of mother-tongue instruction is compelling

Connecting to the students’ context means, in sub-Saharan Africa, first and foremost, moving to mother-tongue instruction, at least in the early grades. It also means a content that builds on the local environment and culture. The experience of Zambia (Box 2), Mali and Burkina Faso with the use of African languages as the medium of instruction demonstrates how these challenges can be tackled.

**Box 2. The bilingual primary reading program in Zambia**

In the first grade of Zambian schools, reading and writing is taught in one of the Zambian languages and accompanied by the teaching of oral English. In the second grade, students continue education in the Zambian language, while oral and written English is taught based on what was learned in first year. From year three to year seven, consolidation of the teaching of reading and writing in the Zambian language and English is carried out. Seven Zambian languages and English are all languages of instruction; each is used to teach how to read and write in that language. For other subjects, at all levels, English, which remains the official language, is the language of instruction. However, teachers and pupils may express themselves in English or in one of the Zambian languages to improve communication. Textbooks and teachers’ guides have been prepared. Teachers were trained to teach the two languages – a Zambian language and English. The content of the training is included in the *New Breakthrough To Literacy* training manual.

Launched in 1998 as a pilot project in two districts involving 25 schools, 50 teachers and 2,000 pupils, the PRP rapidly developed, and since the school year 2002-2003 has covered all 4,271 primary schools in Zambia. This rapid expansion is due to the excellent results recorded. In first year, an improvement of 780% was recorded for the test in Zambian languages in 2,000 compared with the data from 1999. In second year, a 575% improvement was recorded in the English language test. Finally, from year three to year five, the improvement in reading results varied between 165% and 484%. Overall, children read at the desired level in Zambian languages and are a year behind in English, whereas the previous data showed they were at least two years behind in both languages.
Curricula responding to diverse demands

Responding to the labor market and economic expectations of parents and society means that the curricula will need to emphasize the acquisition of basic skills. In a world where economic development is increasingly affected by the ability to compete in a global market and production processes change rapidly, the basic education curriculum should prepare students for a labor market maybe more than 50 years in the future and provide the students not so much with the specific skills demanded in today’s market but with the ability to adapt to new skill requirements of tomorrow.

Box 3: The school program on HIV/AIDS in Uganda

Uganda is one of the first countries to have introduced a school program about HIV/AIDS. In 1986, the Education Ministry launched a major campaign including the preparation of curricula for primary and secondary education, seminars, training workshops for teachers, plays about HIV/AIDS and above all the introduction of education on HIV prevention as part of a national policy. The newsletter *Straight Talk* aimed at secondary school pupils and *Young Talk* aimed at primary schools were widely distributed. The *Madarasa AIDS Education and Prevention Project (MAEP)* was carried out by the Islamic Association of Uganda (IMAU) and UNICEF in 350 schools with the aim of providing information and teaching on how to behave with infected people.

Encouraging signs have been observed since then: A decrease in the number of HIV infections, a drop in the percentage of young pregnant women (15-19 year old) infected from 29.5% in 1992 to 10-14% in 1996, an increase in the age of first sexual intercourse, and a reduction in the number of occasional partners and increased use of condoms.

Health education has taken on a particular importance with the recognition of the critically important contribution that education can make to the fight against the spread of the pandemic. The experience of Uganda is particularly encouraging in this regard.
The Process of Curriculum Reform is as Important as the Content

Many curriculum reforms have faltered on the rocks of implementation and have not delivered what was expected. In many cases they did not take into account parental expectations, in others they failed to recognize the practical problems of classroom application faced by teachers. The process of reform or curriculum innovation is as important as the content. The establishment and successful operation of a partnership in multiple forms, the clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the different players and entities involved, the modulated participation of these players and entities, the realistic nature of expectations and the taking into account of the realities of classroom practice are the sine qua non for the success of any curriculum reform or innovation operation (Plante, 2003). The absence of these conditions – participation, in particular – brings a twofold risk: The risk of perceiving curriculum reform as “a purely political and administrative activity that can be carried out without the true participation of all those concerned. More seriously, the risk is that a narrow pragmatic vision will be adopted that will reduce the implementation of a curriculum reform, originally designed as a pedagogical activity that may have administrative consequences, to an administrative activity that may have pedagogical consequences” (Plante, 2003, p. 28; ADEA translation).
Classrooms with Improved Practice

The classroom is where inputs are transformed into learning. Without a competent teacher no curriculum can be implemented effectively. In sub-Saharan Africa, improving teaching practice requires changes in the traditional rote learning methods that still dominate the vast majority of classrooms. Efforts to shift instructional practice towards open-ended approaches, such as discovery learning, competency-based instruction and child-centered, activity-oriented teaching have been difficult to implement throughout the world. Given the reality of the African classroom, with often very large student numbers or multi-grading, a shift towards instructional methods that are more direct and explicitly focused on learning appears as a more realistic starting point. Promising instructional methods for these situations do exist; they include the use of highly structured self-learning materials accompanied by explicit teaching of new content, as in Escuela Nueva (Colombia) and BRAC (Bangladesh).

The early years are crucial
The need for change is particularly urgent in the first two years of schooling. These years are particularly critical to a child’s educational future, as they lay the foundations of the basic literacy and numeracy skills. Research in the United States suggests that the level of reading competence at the end of the first year of schooling is a highly reliable indicator of future successful learning performance. And yet many children are particularly poorly served in these early years. This underscores the importance of cost-effective Early Childhood Development programs, which prepare children for formal schooling, and of interventions that target the learning environment in the early years of schooling.

A changing context for teacher development
Whatever instructional practices are adopted as desirable has implications for how teachers are prepared, at both the pre-service and in-service levels. In this respect, very significant changes are taking place in the way teachers are trained, hired, and remunerated. Some countries – Guinea, for example – are recruiting teachers with more general education, shorter pre-service preparation, and more classroom-based teaching practice experience.
Box 4: Innovations in teacher education in Guinea and Uganda

Facing a shortage of 2,000 contract teachers a year, Guinea decided in 2000 to restructure its existing three-year pre-service teacher training program and test an alternative model that would increase output while preserving quality by emphasizing pedagogical knowledge and instructional practice. The first year of the program consists of coursework interspersed with periods of student teaching in ordinary schools supervised by pedagogical advisors in collaboration with the host/mentor teacher and school head. The second year is a year-long student teaching experience where the prospective teacher assumes full responsibility for a classroom. During this year, he or she still receives support from a pedagogical advisor as well as a mentor teacher.

The quantitative objective was met beyond expectations as the program trained 1,522 new teachers (37% of whom are women) per year compared with less than 200 previously. This result was obtained without loss in quality. An evaluation conducted in 2002 by PASEC found that, overall, students taught by graduates of the new program performed better than students taught by graduates of the previous program. Moreover, students taught by the second cohort scored higher than students taught of the new program by the first cohort or by graduates of the previous program, which suggests that the new program is gaining in effectiveness.

In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports uses a combination of distance education and short residential face-to-face sessions during the holidays to deliver in-service training and professional support for all serving teachers, head teachers, outreach tutors, education managers (particularly district inspectors of schools), school management committees, PTAs, and community workers. Head teachers undergo a special one-year certificate course in basic management skills.

The programs are implemented through a network of coordinating centers, each of which coordinates a cluster of an average of 22 outreach schools. One school in each cluster is selected to serve as a coordinating center school. The coordinating center tutors are provided with motorcycles and/or bicycles to facilitate their mobility. They are expected to visit each outreach school for at least half a day each month. They also relate with their local communities through Coordinating Center Committee meetings and are in regular contact with their respective District Education Offices. The program is reported to have boosted teachers’ morale, promoted equity in the distribution of qualified teachers across the country and revitalized the primary teaching profession in Uganda.

Increasingly new teachers, with or without pre-service preparation, are hired as contract teachers, often by district authorities or communities. This places new demands on in-service training systems, which must respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse teaching force. Uganda and Guinea (Box 4) have tackled this challenge with decentralized programs aiming at continuous improvement of teaching practice instead of the traditional centrally directed occasional in-service events.
Schools Focused on Learning

An explicit focus on student learning is the linchpin of any school improvement effort (Hopkins, 2001). Most if not all education programs aimed at quality improvement anticipate a positive impact on student learning. But, in fact, the emphasis has often been on the provision of inputs to schooling. Increasingly there are attempts to (i) prioritize investment choices on the basis of explicit student learning objectives (Heneveld and Craig, 1996); (ii) embrace a vision of teaching and learning that will help attain these objectives; and (iii) carefully monitor student learning and using it as a key input in formative evaluations.

Sufficient instructional materials for every school

To provide a real opportunity to learn, sufficient instructional materials will have to be available to every student. Benin (Box 5) and Kenya, for example, have specified the inputs every child should have. Teachers should be prepared to use these materials, have knowledge of effective instructional practice, and be ready to adopt and adapt such practices. But sustained school improvement is a process that will involve the whole school. Conditions need to be created within the school to ensure that individuals are supported through the inevitably difficult and challenging process of altering their ways of thinking and doing. The experience of the Aga Khan Foundation in Kenya and of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma program in Namibia illustrates the challenges involved in these processes of pedagogical renewal. An important lesson is that the scope and the pace of improvement will vary widely among schools, depending on the socio-economic environment, the internal resources of the school, its previous experience with change and the effectiveness of external support.

2. Only 6 out of 17 programs reviewed for their impact on school effectiveness have increases in student learning as an explicit focus (see chapter 8 of the full document).
Box 5: Improving input provision in Benin

In the mid-1980s, as part of a broad sector reform program, the Ministry of National Education of Benin initiated a participatory process that led to the definition and adoption of a set of 50 quality norms. A nationwide assessment of the conditions of teaching and learning using these norms as indicators revealed that on average schools were below one-third of the desired minimal level. As a result, ten priority norms were identified and used as a tool for designing three-year intervention and investment plans in priority zones to increase or maintain school characteristics at minimal level. This included printing and provision of one French and one math textbook for every two pupils, one workbook per pupil, and 10,000 teachers’ guides per subject for all subjects. The implementation of these plans is reported to have improved indicators such as GER (68.84% to 88.49%), gender parity (0.61 to 0.69), grade repetition (25.11% to 19.84%), retention (41.8% to 49.2%), and completion (34.3% to 36.1%) between 1996 and 2001. However, these results are less than expected. Explanatory factors include a 35.7% increase in the number of schools during the period, teacher shortages, a dysfunctional teacher development network, the presence of 40% unqualified teachers in the teaching force, and lack of textbooks and limited use of those made available.

Head teachers as transformational leaders

The evidence that successful quality improvement is a whole school process led by the head teacher is compelling. Yet, often the head teacher’s role has been reduced to an administrative one. Instructional leadership is a challenge for which few head teachers are well prepared. But most important is the emerging transformational role, in which the head teacher leads and coordinates the efforts of teachers and community stakeholders to improve teaching and learning processes and develops the capacity of the school community to implement change and enhance the school’s effectiveness. Changing the selection of head teachers to a process that is competence-based rather than seniority-based is a first step. In addition, the training programs that a number of countries have launched (Box 6) to prepare the head teachers for the demands of this role are examples of promising practice that has the potential to contribute significantly to the goal of quality Education for All.

The role of head teachers is becoming even more critical, as education management reforms in Africa increasingly emphasize school-based management and provide funding for non-salary inputs (e.g., in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique) and development expenditures directly to schools (e.g., Mauritania, Tanzania, Uganda). Allocation of these resources often requires a considerable planning effort by head teachers, usually in collaboration with school management committees of PTAs. Few are adequately prepared for...
these new responsibilities, and building capacity in schools and community organizations is part and parcel of a successful school improvement program.

**Box 6: Head teacher support groups in Kenya**

Kenya launched the Primary School Management (PRISM) program in 1996 with the goal of developing the competence of all 16,700 school heads in key areas of school management, including curriculum management, personnel management, and management of material, financial and physical resources. To ensure sustainability, the program was designed to strengthen locally available professional support and identify resources in the community and school environment of each school head. A key program component is the *Head Teacher Support Group* (HTSG), under the leadership of zonal inspectors. HTSGs provide the opportunity for school heads to meet on a regular basis with other educators, particularly inspectors and community members, to discuss various issues related to pedagogy and school administration.

Various studies conducted in Kenya have revealed that HTSGs have a positive impact on several indicators of improvement of basic education, including school governance, student participation and achievement, admission and retention rates, parent and community participation in school life and activities, gender equity in access, parental financial contribution, instructional leadership of school heads, implementation of effective strategies for decentralizing the training of school heads, and design and implementation of teacher development activities by school heads.

**Support to and supervision of school improvement**

Administrative and instructional supervision and support play an important role in improving what goes on in schools and in classrooms. There is also overwhelming evidence that the supervision and support that schools and teachers typically receive from inspectors and pedagogical advisors is insufficient and ineffective. This is particularly the case in most sub-Saharan countries. From a quantitative viewpoint, the situation has deteriorated with the expansion of educational systems. There are simply not enough inspectors and pedagogical advisors to cater to all schools and teachers on a regular basis. Often resources for school visits are inadequate and the pedagogical support and advisory functions mostly neglected. Small, remote schools are especially ill served.
The New Paradigm: Reaching the Learners

With the many different patterns of living, gender imbalances and numerous groups in difficult circumstances found in Africa, diverse arrangements for educational provision must be the norm. Small rural and migratory communities need different models than urban or larger rural groupings. Diversity, flexibility and openness to new ways of teaching must be features of an education system that aims to reach all children. This is not an argument for alternatives to formal education but instead for alternatives within the formal education system. It means that each government – doubtless in cooperation with appropriate partners – will need to develop and support a range of programs to fit the needs of different communities and groups of learners.

Reaching out to learners

This kind of diversity requires a paradigm shift in thinking about educational provision. The current dominant paradigm is largely supply driven: getting learners to come to school or class. The complementary paradigm is demand focused: getting education to reach the learners. That would entail looking at where the learners actually are, negotiating with them or their families what they would accept as worthwhile education, and examining how best to arrange for it within the possibilities of the learner’s environment, means and commitments. This second paradigm already operates in adult education; REFLECT in Burkina Faso is an example. It also operates here and there for children, for example, in the Save the Children work in Mali and in the programs targeting transient populations in Nigeria (Box 7). Such a shift in approach would likely foster openness to what has been called “mutual learning” or “non-formalizing the formal while formalizing the non-formal.” The shift towards the use of African languages as the medium of instruction in Mali and Burkina Faso are examples of this process.
Box 7. Schooling nomadic and fishing communities in Nigeria

In 1989 some 3 million children in Nigeria’s nomadic and migratory fishing communities did not have access to education. To reach them, an initiative designed to provide education opportunities adapted to their ways of life was launched. In three years, enrollments increased from 18,831 to 229,944 pupils. Further, the gender parity ratio improved from 0.54 to 0.85.

But relatively disappointing quality outcomes led in 1992 to several additional initiatives. The first, community sensitization and empowerment, aimed to gain the active support of parents and communities. It provided literacy classes, extension services and cooperative societies for the adults. The second, pedagogical renewal and teacher development, oriented mainstream teachers to the culture and values of the pastoral and fisher communities and introduced more effective teaching methods and materials. Most important, special efforts were made to train and retain teachers from the communities. Third, 700 collapsible classrooms were imported to move with the pastoral communities, while 25 motorized boat schools were introduced to follow the children of the migrant fisher communities. New incentives for the teachers comprised better housing, motorcycles and bicycles. As a result the transition rate from primary to secondary school rose from 45% in 1992 to 54.6% in 2002, an absolute increase of more than nine times.

The demand for education is usually strong

Experiences in countries that have launched universal primary education initiatives (e.g., Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi) show that demand for education exists among families for their children and among young and older adults whose right to education has been either wholly or partially frustrated. This demand is usually strong and widespread and demonstrates itself effectively as soon as a credible, affordable opportunity for education becomes available within reasonable walking distance for children. Although there are also people who have no interest in education and may even oppose it, they tend to be few and to form a dwindling minority. Often the road to success is the mobilization of social support by family members, friends and community and political leaders.

Building partnerships

Government partnerships with non-profit and for-profit non-governmental organizations and with small community-based organizations to work out arrangements with local communities for the delivery of services have successfully addressed this challenge in several instances. The support to community schools in Senegal using the faire-faire strategy shows the potential of this approach (Box 8).
Box 8. Local community schools in Senegal

These were initiated in Senegal in 1992 and 1993 by two NGOs and were subsequently adopted in 1996 as a basic component of the alternative models tested by the ministry responsible for alternative education programs. They are currently in use by a number of private and community-based operators subsidized by the ministry and a large number of NGOs. They target youth aged 9 to 15 who were never enrolled in school (and are illiterate) or who left school early (school dropouts and others not enrolled). The pedagogical approach used has three goals: The integration of young people into socio-economic activities in their environment, continuing secondary school study, and pre-vocational training or integration into certain jobs. The model is based mainly on (i) the design and self-management of the school by the local community; (ii) the inclusion of children, particularly girls, who are not enrolled or have dropped out of a four-year educational cycle (the equivalent of six years of elementary school); (iii) the use of national languages as the main language of instruction and French as a second language; (iv) support for the basic adolescent education program by the adult literacy program; (v) a coordinated parents school/children's school approach, and (vi) the use of learning methods focused on promoting the environment.

Diversification is a necessary but rarely an easy option. Initiatives in Nigeria and Burkina Faso developed slowly and even after a decade still reach only a minority of the children and adults they strive to reach. The experiences reviewed suggest ways to overcome some of the obstacles:

- Government commitment to the principle of diversity (i.e., to a system with common core objectives that values local variations and recognizes there can be no single pattern for getting education to the learners) is essential.
- Flexibility in recruitment of teachers and substantial investment in their training and support will often be required to allow hiring people from the community often with a limited general education.
- Intensive communication among all the parties and clear and clearly defined and understood roles for each are essential for the feasibility of any initiative.
- Evaluation of costs and outcomes is essential if program coverage is to be expanded and fungible resources from the national budget are to be allocated to alternative programs. Without convincing evidence of the benefits and the cost of an innovation or reform, few policy makers will be ready to adopt the innovation system-wide.
Restructuring Education Sector Management

In most countries education has traditionally been managed through highly centralized systems with standardized models of schooling. This has often resulted in inefficient application of resources, inequitable provision of access and unacceptable differences in quality of instruction and learning achievement between rich and poor, urban and rural, and boys and girls, and has thwarted progress towards the EFA goals. In response large changes in the way education is managed are taking place throughout the region.

Towards school-based management
The trend towards school-based management, through which schools are given more leeway to make decisions about curriculum, budgets, resource allocation, staff and students, is critically important. Within broadly defined national standards and operational parameters schools have increasing autonomy and flexibility to adapt school organization and instructional practice to local conditions. Teachers are being encouraged to adapt reforms and innovations to local conditions and student learning needs. In countries such as Uganda (Box 9), Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique, the resource transfer takes place as conditional block grants; in others, for example Madagascar (Box 10), Senegal and Guinea, it is given in support of projects developed at the school level or through subsidies to community-owned and -operated schools, as in Chad. Senegal has outsourced much of the provision of literacy and non-formal education programs to non-government providers (Box 11).

There is a large variation in the way these processes are implemented, and progress is almost always more uneven and slower than expected. Government financial procedures are often poorly adapted to the demands of decentralized financial management. But, most important, it is the lack of experience and capacity constraints at the school level and in the school management committees that has often hindered progress. At the same time there are several promising experiences (Uganda, Tanzania, Guinea), which suggest that a persistent effort at building capacity for planning and experimentation at the school level can help create an environment highly conducive to quality improvement.
**Box 9. Uganda: Devolution of financial management**

With the UPE policy, school fees levied on parents have been abolished, and the schools receive a capitation grant. The grant is calculated centrally and released as a conditional block grant to districts which, in turn, release all funds to schools on the basis of enrollment. Ministry guidelines set parameters for the allocation of funds, for example 50% for instructional materials, 5% for administration. The grant system provides about $4 per child per year for children in grades 1 through 3 and $6 per child per year for children in the next four years. The grants fund school needs other than teachers’ salaries and textbooks.

The school management committee (SMC) manages the money. At first the grants did not always reach schools in time, and allocation decisions by the SMC were not always transparent. To address this, grant amounts received from the district office are posted publicly in the school, and any parent or other community member can access the records of how the money is spent. Regular audits also ensure that the funds reach the schools and are utilized for the purposes intended.

**Box 10. Program contracts in Madagascar**

Program contracts in Madagascar are based on local traditions of agreement and commitment. The strategy is based on a bottom-up, participatory approach with the steady empowerment of the community and its increasing involvement in the life of the school. The community is responsible for identifying its education needs. Each contract (which is a school project that defines each party’s tasks and responsibilities) concerns five parties: the village community, the teachers, the school principal, the school district and the support project. Out of the 12,330 public elementary schools, about 4,330 (34%) in 63 (out of 111) districts have adopted the program contract approach. Parents and the community have become more aware of their role and power in a fruitful partnership.

The move towards school-based management has important consequences for central ministry offices. Their role is evolving towards (i) setting norms and standards; (ii) mobilizing adequate financing and ensuring the timely transfer of resources to schools; (iii) monitoring policy implementation and assessing progress in student learning; and (iv) stimulating public discussion of education policy issues and nurturing social and political partnership for education reform. Moreover, several countries are exploring the potential of support from the business community.
Box 11. The “faire-faire” strategy in Senegal

In 1991 Senegal developed a policy and action plan to address the challenge of expanding education opportunities by diversifying the providers through a “faire-faire” (outsourcing) strategy, designed to bring about a partnership between government and civil society organizations. The government remained responsible for regulating providers; coordinating, monitoring and evaluating program implementation; and mobilizing and allocating resources. Civil society organizations became responsible for designing and implementing programs, building community capacity and carrying out action-research. Communities participated in identifying needs, and taking part in, and developing local arrangements for, management and follow-up. Diversifying the educational supply involved more than a dozen adult functional literacy programs and alternative models for young people’s education, which have made it possible to enroll more than a million learners. About 20 billion CFA francs in new funding were obtained for the sector. The literacy rate increased from 31.1% to 53.9%. Based on its openness to the local environment and to pedagogical change, “faire-faire” has made it possible to provide basic training opportunities responding to community demand, facilitate the introduction of national languages into elementary school, and integrate education and training programs into local development plans.

Broader involvement of communities

All these changes are usually supported by deliberate efforts to involve communities in the process of schooling and the management of the resources provided as direct support to schools. A range of alternative education structures and program delivery mechanisms are thus being experimented with to ensure responsiveness to the needs and the priorities of people in different social, cultural and economic contexts. The role of the communities in school management is broadening beyond their traditional involvement in classroom construction to include participation in decisions on local adaptation of the curriculum and school calendar, managing school resources and monitoring and evaluation of school operations.

The African experience with decentralization remains incomplete and the lessons tentative, but it does suggest that:

• Separating financing from provision allows governments to tap the contribution of multiple sources of provision. However, ensuring equality of educational opportunity requires significant central funding even for locally implemented programs.
• The restructuring of education management has important implications not only for the lower levels of the hierarchy but also for the central services.
• A major challenge that few countries have tackled successfully is managing, deploying and providing professional support to teachers.
• Effective restructuring will require sustained capacity development, including clear definition of roles and responsibilities, incentives for performance, continuous training and technical support at all levels of the system.
Monitoring Learning, Assessing Progress

Effective management of quality improvement in a system that is increasingly decentralized, involves multiple providers to deliver programs adapted to a wide range of local conditions, and relies on multiple sources of financing. This cannot be done without reliable information to guide resource allocation and action. Assessments of student learning and statistics on key system performance indicators such as coverage, internal efficiency, teacher deployment and material input availability are the essential management information instruments in such a system.

Monitoring progress in student learning

Information on student learning can come from (i) public examinations; (ii) national assessments; (iii) international assessments; and (iv) classroom assessment. Calls for reform of examinations are ubiquitous. Evidence of the effects of examinations on teaching and learning suggests that if the content of exam items is changed, the content to which students are exposed in class will change in response. Yet a lack of teacher competence, large classes, a lack of resource material, and the difficulty of teaching higher-order skills is likely to over-ride the influence of changes in examinations.

Examinations should not be an obstacle to quality improvement, but should provide support for it; for example, they should help extend curriculum coverage, reflect their certification function by including content that is appropriate for all levels of student achievement, and provide itemized performance feedback to schools. Box 12 summarizes the experience of Kenya.

National assessment activity spread through Africa during the 1990s. The Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) project, PASEC, and the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) project have been highly instrumental in building national assessment capacity in more than 20 countries. The information obtained in a national assessment about strengths and weaknesses in the knowledge and skills students have acquired and about how achievement is distributed by gender and location can play an important role in informing policy and decision-making. Yet
information from assessments often remains within the research community and has not often contributed to the design and implementation of quality improvement strategies. *International assessments* provide comparative data on achievement in several countries. Few African countries have participated, so far. However, some of the national assessments that have been carried out allow international comparisons. These can provide important opportunities for learning from countries facing comparable constraints and challenges.

**Box 12. Examination reform in Kenya**

In the 1970s steps were taken to reform examinations at the end of primary school in Kenya. The content of the examinations was changed to:

- Include fewer items that measured memorization of factual information and more that measured higher order skills (comprehension, application); and
- Focus on the measurement of skills that could be applied in a wide range of contexts, in and out of school.

The changes were designed to affect how teachers prepared students for the examinations and, in particular, to encourage the teaching and acquisition of competencies that would be useful to the majority of pupils who would leave school after the examinations. Two types of information were provided to support these changes:

- Incentive information, comprising the publication of a district and school order merit list based on performance on the examination (league tables);
- Guidance information summarized in a newsletter based on an analysis of the performance of students nationally on individual questions, and suggestions for teaching topics and skills that students had problems with.

While the initial impact of the reforms was to widen achievement differences among districts, this trend was reversed after the system had been in operation for four years: nearly all districts in which performance had been relatively poor showed striking gains relative to performance in other districts.

Although *classroom assessment* has attracted the least attention in proposals to use assessment to improve the quality of education, it would seem to have the greatest potential to enhance students’ achievements. However, teacher’s assessments are often of poor quality and do little to foster the development of higher-order and problem-solving competencies in students. Unfortunately, improving teachers’ assessment practices is more difficult than improving or developing other forms of assessment.

The Africa experience to date suggests that assessment information can improve policy and the management of resources in education and can shape teachers’ instructional practice but that success is not assured. If assessment
procedures are to contribute to the improvement of student learning, at least two conditions must be met. First, assessment policy should be integrated into a broader range of comprehensive and co-ordinated improvement measures, which assessment reforms are designed to reinforce. And second, since the success of educational reforms ultimately depends on their successful implementation in classrooms, resources should be provided to ensure that reform policy is understood and acted on in schools.

**Monitoring system performance**
Considerable work has been done to strengthen the capacity of countries to produce educational statistics and indicators that will enable to monitor closely the performance of their education systems. The National Education Statistical Information Systems (NESIS) program of the ADEA Working Group on education statistics has promoted the use of efficient methodologies and technical tools, including ICT applications, designed to help countries to control the “statistical chain” and ensure reliable data collection and processing. A module for the development of indicators of education quality is being tested.
**Financing Quality**

Bruns et al. (2003) proposed a framework for estimating the cost of reaching the EFA goals in 33 African countries, which is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Indicative EFA costing framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil-teacher ratio</th>
<th>40</th>
<th>Govt. revenues as % of GDP</th>
<th>14/16/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher salaries/per capita GDP</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>% of govt. revenues for education</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% recurrent spending on non-teacher inputs</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Primary ed. share of govt. spending on education</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% repeaters</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>% pupils in privately-financed schools</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On this basis they estimate an external finance gap of about $1.9 billion per year on average. This means a fourfold increase in the level of donor support, to reach 45% of total cost, in 2015. Moreover, the estimates may be too low, especially as regards financing for quality improvement.

The 33% target for non-teacher salary expenditures used by Bruns et al. would result in an average expenditure per child of $23 in 2015, including administration cost ($10) and financing of specific actions to ensure education opportunities for about 10% of the children specifically at risk. If the total amount of $13 would be available for school-level quality input, this would be close to a minimal level of inputs ($16), but very far from the desirable level of about $30. However, if the 5% annual growth rate assumed by Bruns et al. would turn out to be only 3%, the absolute value of the 33% would become only $17 by 2015, much below even the minimal level of inputs. In addition, there is a timing issue, as the boost to non-teacher salary recurrent spending has to take place well before the resulting quality improvements will take their full effect. The increased provision of the quality-enhancing material inputs with an estimated cost of $16 per student (of which an estimated $10 to $12 would be additional expenditures) is needed now to support immediate improvements in instructional practice, which can then bring about the efficiency gains that the model has projected to occur throughout the period. This would increase the annual financing requirement in the early years by about $700 million, representing an increase of about 30% of the total estimated recurrent primary education expenditures in 2000.
Responding to variations in local conditions

It is therefore important to explore the options that countries have to deal with possible shortfalls in internal or external financing and still remain on track towards the EFA goals. Four policy options were quantified in the context of the Bruns et al. model and summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Implications of changes in the EFA costing parameters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>33 African countries</th>
<th>EFA Cost (annual)</th>
<th>Domestic resources (annual)</th>
<th>Financial gap (annual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary cost change from 3.5 to 3 times GDP/cap</td>
<td>-6.4%</td>
<td>-373</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of primary education spending from total change from 50 to 55%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil/teacher ratio 40 to 45</td>
<td>-8.0%</td>
<td>-469</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double classroom use</td>
<td>-6.2%</td>
<td>-363</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school enrollment from 10 to 15%</td>
<td>-3.9%</td>
<td>-228</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL MEASURES COMBINED</td>
<td>-20.2%</td>
<td>-1182</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The calculations show how policy decisions affect the financing gap. The effects are significant and illustrate the flexibility that exists to adjust policy to external conditions. They also suggest, assuming that increases in external financial assistance beyond the projections of Bruns et al. are unlikely, that countries will be well advised to consider strategies that (i) deploy available resources with optimal effectiveness and (ii) encourage community and parental contributions to education development. Increased cost effectiveness will require, first, reducing the variation in the level of allocation of resources, in particular in teacher-pupil ratios, among schools. Second, it will require enhancing efficiency by spending resources on those inputs and processes that are known to be strongly supportive of student learning. And finally it makes it imperative to pursue whenever possible low cost solutions such as community-based early childhood and adult basic education programs and community-managed classroom construction (Box 13).
Box 13. Community-managed classroom construction in Mauritania

When communities in Mauritania managed the implementation of the national classroom construction program, unit costs were cut from $18,000 to $4,600; classrooms used simpler architectural standards but were the same size and had similar life expectancy. Communities were fully responsible for construction, just as if they would build with their own resources, even though the government provided 70% co-financing. Building decisions were left to the communities; the standard design was simple and sturdy enough to overcome community resistance to building with materials not commonly used for school construction; the project financing system was transparent, easily understood by communities, and made it difficult to misuse funds; and communities were supported with technical assistance. Payment of grants was made on a tranche basis, according to progress made. In general, strategies for successful community-based construction include: (i) using locally available materials; (ii) using construction techniques familiar to villagers, local craftsmen and contractors; (iii) limiting design improvements to those necessary to ensure durability and safety; and (iv) clearly defining responsibilities of partners. Regular technical supervision helps to ensure that quality standards of construction are met but it does not substitute for close monitoring by communities.

Community support

Equally important is to value the readiness of many communities and parents to contribute to the education of their children. There is a long tradition of such contributions in many African countries, but it is important to establish partnerships and policies that do not place an unduly heavy burden on the poorest. The absolute principle of such polices must be that no child shall be excluded from school because of inability to pay. Several mechanisms have been tested: matching grants with variable community contributions depending on the poverty level, waivers of tuition and book fees, direct support to the neediest and the most disadvantaged, and formal recognition of the monetary value of contributions in kind. There is considerable evidence suggesting that such schemes are effective, in particular when communities manage them.

A review by Roberts-Schweitzer et al. (2002) concluded that communities can find ways to identify the poorest (and largest) families in order to avoid excessive burdens on those at risk by waiving fees and providing support to meet other school expenditures. As an instrument of school financing, community approved and self-imposed transparent school contributions are obviously preferable to the hidden fees and levies that are often lost in the pockets of school principals or in the finance offices of district administrations.
In sum, the financial challenge of the Education for All programs is to ensure that what parents can and do contribute is complemented effectively by public funding in such a way that no child is unable to access opportunities for quality learning. Emerging experience suggests that two policy areas are important in this regard: (i) meaningful involvement of communities in decisions on the allocation of the resources available at the school level, and (ii) effective targeting of adequate public resources to the most disadvantaged, based on local level identification of need and ability to pay. Countries will need to analyze different options and variations of the indicative policy framework proposed by Bruns et al. (2003) to ensure that their national EFA policy framework provides the resources necessary to reach all children with quality education opportunities and do so in a financially sustainable way.
The Road Towards Quality: A Strategic Framework

As in the industrialized world, the path of quality improvement in sub-Saharan Africa has often been rocky and strewn with obstacles. There are experiences that provide warnings and lessons about the obstacles to avoid. But also, and perhaps most importantly, there are promising experiences that offer lessons on the way forward. Establishing policies that aim at optimal efficiency in resource allocation – exploring promising avenues and avoiding blind alleys – is a necessary first step. But it needs to be complemented by actions that are explicitly designed to improve education service delivery and promote quality and equity.

The pillars of quality improvement

The experiences and the literature reviewed for this analysis suggest a quality improvement framework that rests on seven principal pillars:

- **Create the opportunity to learn**: Ensure that essential inputs and supplies are in place and encourage home support and school readiness.
- **Improve instructional practice**: Implement a relevant curriculum, develop competent teachers, help head teachers to become instructional leaders and pay special attention to effective instruction in the early years.
- **Manage the challenge of equity**: Reach out to learners with an array of delivery mechanisms, ensure equitable opportunities to learn for poor children (especially those in rural areas), address the gender challenge and recognize diversity and flexibility in design and provision as essential.
- **Increase school autonomy and flexibility**: Deconcentrate authority to regional and district offices, move towards school-based management, support head teachers as transformational leaders, but recognize monitoring, supervision and support as essential for school improvement.
- **Nurture community support**: Recognize that quality emerges from the interaction of parents, communities and schools, encourage broad community involvement and foster communities as partners in school development.
- **Ensure a realistic financial framework**: Allocate $10-$15 per child/per year for non-salary expenditures, invest in inputs that are known to have...
a strong positive impact on learning achievement, carefully manage the salary bill, reduce the degree of random variation in the allocation of per student resources between schools, tap community contributions and ensure that no child is excluded from school for financial reasons.

• Respond to HIV/AIDS and conflict situations: Continue and expand information campaigns and ensure access to ARV drugs, and develop effective partnerships among governments, NGOs and communities to ensure education opportunities for orphans and children in conflict zones.

A culture of quality
Building a national strategic framework on these seven pillars is critical to improving quality. Equally important, but much less well understood, is the development of a culture that explicitly aims to promote quality and learning. Such a culture of quality is driven and sustained by a set of values and beliefs in the process of teaching and learning – a theory of learning and a vision of educational practice – that is widely shared. Key features are:

• Values that place learning at the center;
• A belief that failure is not an inevitable part of the education process and that all children can learn given time and appropriate instruction;
• A commitment to equitable outcomes and a readiness to vary inputs and processes to achieve these;
• An improvement process that does not simply define outcomes and standards but that focuses, first and foremost, on the means, on the processes and the skills required to bring about quality results; and
• A dedication to universal quality learning based on diversity and flexibility in delivery mechanisms and instructional practice.

Education as a “living system”
Such a culture is unlikely to thrive within a “machine bureaucracy,” the industrial-age model that has long been typical of the schools in the industrialized world and that still survives in many developing countries. In fact, education systems are much more like “living systems.” The new management systems that are emerging are inspired by this new metaphor from the life sciences. Such systems are highly decentralized. They are self-producing; they have the capacity to create within themselves; they continually grow and evolve; they react and adapt continuously to changes in the environment; and they
have a large diversity as each part of the system reacts to information from its environment. Managing such systems means recognizing that the industrial-age command and control models do no longer work. Such systems grow and develop through incentives, through changes in the environment and by each element adapting and adopting successful practice. They are learning organizations. The change in metaphor for the education system is important. It indicates a different way of thinking and a different set of beliefs, a different mental model about what is important and how change occurs.

These kinds of organizations have a high degree of local control. They encourage and support local initiative. They emphasize “improving the quality of thinking, the capacity for reflection and team learning and the ability to develop shared learning and shared understanding of complex...issues. It is these capabilities that will allow learning organizations to be both more locally controlled and more well coordinated than their hierarchical predecessors” (Senge, 2000). Instead of mobilizing school-level stakeholders to respond to mandates from the top, upper levels encourage, respond and support grass-roots-level initiative.

**Leading in a culture of quality**

The most important responsibility of the leaders of the education system is to establish a culture of quality, make sure that it is widely shared, and model and encourage behaviors that put it into practice. It means helping everyone in the system gain a sense of efficacy and responsibility and encouraging them to do their best job with the resources available. It implies a system-wide commitment to the prevention of failure, systematic benchmarking of good practice, and continuous learning. Such notions may seem unrealistic in the sub-Saharan African context. But several of the country cases report experiences that move in this direction. For example, Senegal established agreed-upon job descriptions for all education sector staff (*Box 14*); Benin (*Box 5*) and Kenya defined inputs to be available for every student and school; Madagascar (*Box 10*) has initiated performance contracts with schools; and Swaziland and Namibia are helping teachers to reflect and learn from their own practice.
Box 14: Job performance specifications in Senegal

The development of job performance specifications was used by Senegal to address concerns about the quality of instructional practice. A system of incentives based on a clear task definition for teachers, heads and supervisors was developed. Roles and task descriptions were publicized and provided the basis for performance evaluations. Task specifications for supervisors included a strong emphasis on training and organization.

As a result of the program the pupils’ results improved, but not without effort. The main difficulties were due to the absence of training in results-based management, to the teachers’ conservatism and to inadequate logistics. But improvements were seen at the level of school projects, the teaching team, partnerships, and the openness of the school to the local environment.

Implementation is of the essence

Implementation has long been recognized in developed and in developing countries as the Achilles heel of education policy reform, especially reform that aims at large-scale changes in the process of teaching and learning. Many carefully designed programs have foundered on the rocks of implementation. The assumption that change is an orderly, rational and linear process that provides centrally defined fixes to the quality problems of schools is one that has been found to be false in almost every instance. In fact, there is an emerging consensus that (i) change is essentially a local process with the school as the unit of change; (ii) local learning and adaptation are key; (iii) developing local capacity – at the school, the community and the district level – is a condition sine qua non for success; and (iv) progress is incremental and uneven.

Implementation depends on application by thousands of teachers working behind the classroom door. Good practice cannot be mandated but must be grounded in local ownership. Ultimately it is the coherence of the triad student learning, teacher learning and development, and school capacity that will determine the effectiveness of particular school improvement policies. Based on their reviews, Verspoor (1989) and Moulton et al. (2002) argue for an implementation model that provides for flexible and incremental implementation strategies, includes arrangement for learning from experience, allows the development and implementation of several innovations, recognizes and values local level experience, and considers policy development and implementation as continuous, iterative and mutually reinforcing processes.

The country case studies prepared for this book include several examples of programs that are moving in this direction. The trends towards school-based
management, the use of locally prepared school development plans as a basis for resource allocation, as well as decentralized, demand-driven, in-service teacher training and support programs, and the participatory approaches to program development provide strong indications of the changes in the “mental models” of school improvement that are occurring in agencies, education ministries and other stakeholders. For example Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda are providing substantial discretionary resources to schools to be managed locally; Senegal and Guinea are experimenting with the funding of school development plans. In-service teacher development is delivered in a decentralized locally responsive way in Guinea and Uganda. Mauritania prepared its current education development plan through a participatory and iterative process involving local stakeholders and agencies.
The Way Forward: Learning and Working Together

Many of the challenges discussed in the preceding chapter have been highlighted in reviews of education development experiences and discussed in international meetings. In fact, exhortations to garner political will, design simple projects, build capacity, strengthen partnerships and learn from experience are ubiquitous in the literature. But attempts to operationalize them and identify concrete steps that can be taken to move the quality improvement agenda forward in a coherent way have been relatively few, although the ADEA Working Groups and discussions at biennial meetings have made important contributions in this regard. Evidence assembled for this study suggests five important conditions that need to underpin effective action on quality improvement.

Political commitment to act

First, the political will to act may perhaps be best seen as the initial step towards a broad-based and long-lasting national commitment to a shared vision that embraces quality and equity and that provides the foundation for a “culture of quality.” Such a commitment is not only reflected in public pronouncements of policy, it is also made concrete by:

- Allocation of adequate resources;
- A focus on quality and learning in political discourse;
- Participation of all stakeholders; and
- Effective communication strategies to build broad-based support.

In several countries, for example Mauritania and Uganda, the national priority placed on poverty reduction and accelerated development have led to a sustained high-level commitment for equitable education development. In these cases internal and external work effectively together under a national leadership in a process that is explicitly designed to be participatory and continuous.

Selecting and sequencing priorities

Quality improvement strategies require dealing with two distinct dilemmas. One is the definition of priorities and the other is how to reach a meaningful
number of students with innovations that have an impact on student learning. Setting priorities is in most cases a matter of choice about scope and sequence of innovations. It is not a question about what to do and what not to do. It is answering the question where to start and what to do later. The experience documented in the country case studies and the preceding discussion suggest the following for the selection of program priorities:

- A sense of ownership at the school level is a necessary starting point, with intervention strategies conceived as a menu of options for local choice.
- Improvement in classroom practice based on the recognition of the teacher as the kingpin of quality improvement.
- Reforms of curriculum content and teaching methods need to be conceived as a continuous process, which recognizes that dominant practice changes only gradually.

The most severe constraint on the scope of the innovation is the capacity of the teacher to change teaching practice. Beeby (1966), Verspoor and Leno (1986) and Hopkins (2001) provide frameworks for different intervention strategies according to the school’s capacity to adapt, adopt and apply change. All are school focused and recognize that different schools will have a different capacity to change and that consequently progress will be uneven and often inequitable. To mitigate these effects, implementation strategies will need to target the weakest schools for special assistance and support. An example of the way different elements of a quality improvement can been phased and combined into a coherent strategy is provided by Brazil’s Fundescola program. The sequence is one where initial investments in ownership and essential inputs are followed by the preparation of school development plans that over time become increasingly ambitious. This strategy allowed the government to tie together national objectives for quality improvement in a flexible package with strong local grounding.

Key elements of school-focused strategies can be found in sub-Saharan Africa. Important examples are the job performance specification program in Senegal, the definition of standards for Fundamental Quality Inputs in Benin, the decentralized teacher development and support systems in Guinea (PPSE) and Uganda (TDSM), the moves towards school-based management in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, and the community mobilization efforts in Madagascar and Mali.

The main going-to-scale strategies that have been identified in the literature, “scale by explosion” and “scale by replication”, are also found in the educa-
tion development experience in sub-Saharan Africa. The first is being used in Mauritania to introduce a number of well-defined changes in the way resources are allocated and instruction is organized. Malawi, Uganda and Tanzania have used it to abolish fees and introduce universal primary education with a “big bang.” Burkina Faso used it to introduce results-based school management and support. Yet, almost all country experiences, especially those of Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia, illustrate how the education change process is essentially a learning process through which the lessons from experience are fed back into project design. This sequence of several cycles of learning and adaptation may be what is most characteristic of successful change and innovation.

These and several other country experiences in the region seem to lend support to David Korten’s (1980) suggestion that a strategy for going to scale will have to go through three phases (i) learning to be effective, (ii) learning to be efficient, and (iii) learning to generalize. Most pilot programs focus on the first step. But few do actually develop convincing evidence on learning outcomes and cost or prepare for the day when the human, the institutional and the financial large-scale applications preclude the kind of nurturing and close-up support that allows a pilot program to be successful.

In fact, there may be a case to rethink the design of pilot projects and deliberately conceive them as a series of innovations, each of limited scope, that do not deviate too far from existing practice and can be adapted and applied by a large number of teachers without too much difficulty and support. Implementation over time of a series of those innovations, gradually increasing the capacity of schools to change, would in fact combine the functional and the explosion strategy and be a real learning strategy.

**Capacity building**

As the circle of stakeholders involved in education has enlarged, capacity building is widely recognized as a critical priority. But not much progress has been made addressing it. Effective capacity-building strategies begin by creating an environment that encourages the utilization of existing capacity. Management audits and decentralization are among the promising approaches in this regard. Capacity building will need to focus on the school, but for this to be successful schools will need to be supported by meso-level institutions. Building at the meso level new types of organizations that actively engage
with schools must be at the heart of a capacity-building strategy, especially in a context of decentralization and moves towards school-based management. These institutions would not be arranged in a hierarchy; quite the opposite, they would work in parallel across the meso-level, effectively flattening the education system. They would include networks, research and training centers, professional organizations, social and community projects, and ministry offices. Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Gambia are among the countries that have undertaken an in-depth organizational analysis as part of a comprehensive capacity-building strategy in the sector.

Partnerships are ubiquitous
More active partnerships have been one of the most successful outcomes since Jomtien concluded the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (Amman, 1996). The Dakar Framework for Action echoed this and called for “broad-based partnerships within countries, supported by co-operation with regional and international agencies and institutions.” Partnerships happen at different levels in the system and with different purposes. Partnerships at school and community level largely aim to support the delivery of education services, often to the most disadvantaged populations. Other partnerships shape development cooperation and education aid. Important changes are underway in both. The past decade has seen the proliferation of NGOs, ranging in capacity from well-supported international NGOs to small fly-by-night operations. NGOs have often gained a stronger voice in policy decisions and become a source of reliable community-level implementers of education sector program activities. The government role here is often an enabling one. At the national level SWApPs are changing the way education development programs are financed and managed. About 15 countries are working together with internal and external partners through an education SWAp mechanism.

Learning from practice
The country case studies underpinning this paper and the preceding analyses clearly demonstrate that quality improvement is a multifaceted and complex process – in the industrialized world and in Africa. Yet experience is accumulating and lessons are being learned as countries pursue a “quality Education
for All” agenda, suggesting that the strategy and practice of quality improvement on the continent should aim at:

- **Developing a system of learning institutions with flexibility in delivery and equivalence in objectives.** Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique are introducing a system of per-student grants to be managed at the school level. Senegal, Guinea and Burkina Faso are introducing management systems that place the responsibility for the design and implementation of quality improvement strategies at the school and district level. Alternative learning systems are being established in Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

- **Ensuring that a focus on learning permeates the education system and gives it coherence.** Teacher development programs in Guinea, Uganda and Zanzibar are explicitly designed to help teachers identify obstacles to student learning, propose remedial action and monitor the impact. Zambia, Mali and Burkina Faso are introducing African languages as the medium of instruction in the early grades. Namibia and Swaziland are introducing strategies of continuous assessment of student learning as a way to enhance achievement.

- **Emphasizing continuous improvement through a sustained effort over time, not quick fixes.** In many countries Mauritania, Uganda, Mali, Tanzania to mention just a few, education development now is defined in the context of a ten-year sector development program with an agreed-upon policy framework and performance indicators.

- **Pursuing evidence based strategies which provide the information necessary for continuous learning from experience.** Examples from Guinea, Mali and Zambia illustrate how a careful monitoring of program cost and outcomes can help the process of going to scale. PASEC, SACMEQ, MLA and NESIS are programs that are helping many countries to develop a database that can inform policy and action.

Quality improvement in basic education is an imperative for all African countries that want to participate in the global information society of the twenty-first century and lift their people out of poverty. But unless the Education for All and fast track policies result in increased learning, the EFA emperor will have no clothes. Many countries are actively testing programs to improve quality. Sharing lessons from experience and learning from each other’s successes and disappointments is essential if policy makers and practitioners in the region are to work together in a community of learners.
Bibliography


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 — Summary

This booklet is a summary of The Challenge of Learning: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book was commissioned by ADEA for discussion at its 2003 Biennial Meeting.

All countries of sub-Saharan Africa reaffirmed their commitment to the goals of learning and completion of basic education for all at the World Education Forum in Dakar. Yet, even after considerable efforts most education systems in the region are far from reaching these goals. The challenge remains daunting. In most countries less than one third of the children of school age acquire the knowledge and the skills specified in their national primary education curriculum. The book argues that meeting the challenge of EFA means addressing the twin challenges of quality and equity. It also explores how the countries of sub-Saharan Africa can do this in a financially viable way.

The book is based on 22 country case studies documenting experiences with quality improvement programs in Africa, forty background papers and a review of unpublished African literature. It summarizes research findings on quality and quality improvement, equity and gender and documents changes in the way external agencies help countries make progress towards the EFA goals. It reviews experiences in sub-Saharan Africa related to the following issues: investments in inputs that are most cost-effective, curriculum reforms to enhance relevance, changes in instructional strategies and teacher development to improve school effectiveness, differentiation of programs and diversification of providers to improve equity of results. It explores how the emphasis on quality and equity affect the way education systems are financed and managed, and student’s learning progress is measured and monitored. Finally it provides a strategic framework for quality improvement.

Education specialists from Africa and its development partners wrote the different chapters. Adriaan Verspoor, a senior education consultant with broad experience in Africa, led the team and edited the book.

The Editor

Adriaan Verspoor is an independent consultant specializing in policy analysis and the design and management of education development programs. From 1976 to 2000 he was at the World Bank, where he held positions in different parts of the institution, including the Africa region where he worked as a task team leader and manager from 1976 to 1984 and as a regional education lead specialist from 1998-2000.

Since his retirement from the World Bank in 2000, Mr. Verspoor has worked as a consultant for ADEA, the World Bank, DFID, ADB and the Netherlands. He continues to be involved in education development in Africa.

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