Community Schools in Africa

A study of provision

This document is a digest of existing research into Community Schools in Africa done for the International Centre of Excellence for Community Schools

Brian Parker 2010

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Background

This is a digest of research conducted by ICECS into community schools in Africa. They attract significant funding support. Intuitively most will agree that community schools which work closely with parents, work in partnership with other agencies to provide services including lifelong learning to families and the wider community, and often use a child-centred approach are likely to have greater impact. Anecdotal evidence supports this view but, strikingly, there is little robust research available. This is the not only the case in Africa, but also in other parts of the world where there are community schools.

It is important to note that there are different motivations for establishing community schools. In some countries the prime focus is on instilling citizenship and democratic processes with an emphasis on volunteering and community-based projects. By contrast, in others the emphasis is on raising the attainment of pupils by providing a range of learning experiences in partnership with other agencies. In some, and this is often the case in African countries, community schools need to have the full engagement and support of parents to ensure that children, and especially girls, are allowed to attend rather than fulfilling their traditional family roles in caring or income generation. It is hardly surprising that with such different driving forces, there is no common research showing where community schools make the greatest contribution.

The danger, and this is borne out by the evidence, is that programmes become insular, with good practice not shared and economies of scale largely unrealised. It is not uncommon to find similar programmes (funded by the same foundation and delivered by the same international charity) with very different and unexplained outcomes. Female participation and retention rates (an issue in many African nations) are a classic example. We have found community schools run by the same NGO in different countries having different rates of success. There is no explanation for the differences in outcomes, and effective practice in one country is not being transferred to another.

Indeed, the most up-to-date research that we could find specifically focusing on community schools in Africa were both published in 2002.

Source for this study

This document summarises the evidence provided in two key documents:

A literature review of community schools – Yolande Miller-Grandvaux and Karla Yoder, commissioned by the USAID Bureau for Africa.

Evolving partnerships: the role of NGOs in basic education in Africa – also commissioned by USAID, Bureau for Africa, and again written by Yolande Miller-Grandvaux with Michel Welmond and Joy Wolf.

We shorten these titles to *Literature review* and *Evolving partnerships* respectively in this document.

Our invitation to you

We invite you to respond to this document. We want to have more up-to-date perspectives on the current state of play as you see it.

Common themes emerging

- The issue of girls' participation is high on the agenda. Another common theme is the relationship between the community school and its partners, in particular with Ministries of Education.

- Tension exists between the NGOs running community schools and Ministries of Education that run public schools in some African countries. There are several reasons; one is accountability. The community schools movement sets out at the grass roots level to create and support a degree of accountability to the local community, which often explains the better recruitment and retention rates; but it is also claimed by some to provide a narrower curriculum than public schools and lower standards. Accountability differs also at the macro level, as the community school and the public school are part of two different systems and, critically, the bodies that are responsible for policy and finance for community schools are invariably not part of the state but an external funder.
- Training and support for teachers is an issue. Often teachers in community schools are given training outside that provided by the state so that their skills and experience remain unacknowledged.
- Support for teachers is concerning; many are isolated and receive very little help with materials, skills development, and so on.
- The emphasis has been on ensuring provision for all, but the quality of that provision has not always been secured. Little evaluation exists to identify best practice, much less disseminate it.

A consideration of the role of NGOs engaged in African primary education

During the 1990s NGOs had been engaged in implementing development programmes. The higher proportion of development resources were channelled to and through NGOs in all sectors, leading to an explosive growth in local NGOs in many African countries.

The education sector was no exception and here most major donor agencies increased the resources allocated through NGOs to implement their education programmes.

Donors used international and local NGOs for education service delivery in both formal and non-formal contexts. Most countries in Africa with a donor supported programme for the education sector had and still have NGOs playing a significant implementing role.

NGOs have not limited their education activities to service delivery. They are also involved in lobbying, advocating for educational reform, and working individually and through networks to participate in policy dialogue in many African countries.

In the context of decentralisation in Africa, NGOs created new spaces for civil society involvement in education and often the funding reflected priorities for both education and civil society development.

The importance of non-government organisations was reinforced by Education For All (EFA) meetings in Johannesburg and Dakar, which recognised the vital role of NGOs in promoting universal and equitable quality of education.

The EFA discussions championed NGOs’ new roles as alternative education providers, innovators, advocates, and policy dialogue partners.

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What explains an increasing presence of NGOs in the education sector?

Donors believed that NGOs working at the community-level affected social change where others could not. NGOs could represent and catalyse civil society, an element many consider critical for sustainability and democratisation; and NGOs are simply more efficient than other partners.

Clearly, some of these claims for NGOs have the potential to alienate other sectors. However, trying to discern whether NGO interventions in the education sector have lived up to donor expectations is a complex task and is more theoretical than practical, given a lack of data.

It is possible to say how NGOs in fact intervened in the education sector, how their presence and relationships with governments and donor partners evolved, what implications their presence had for educational systems and civil society, and which contextual factors affected NGOs' interventions.

The *Evolving partnerships* analysis of Yolande Miller et al considered four major domains of NGOs' involvement in the education sector:

- relationship between NGOs and government
- role of NGOs in education policy
- relationship between NGOs and donors
- the influence of NGOs on civil society.

Both interactions and their impact were analysed across four African countries: Ethiopia, Guinea, Malawi, and Mali. Fundamentally, the question in these countries is now no longer whether NGOs should play a role in the education sector, but how NGOs are most likely to fulfil their promise to improve the quality, equity, accountability, and relevance of education in African countries.

The NGO context

The research identified key variables which had the greatest affect on the specific evolution of NGO programmes in the education sector. These were, firstly, the objectives and strategies of the NGOs themselves, and secondly, each country's unique combination of social and political realities that shaped what NGOs can do. These two factors combined to shape the similarities and differences.

On one level, NGO programmes in the education sector are quite similar across the four countries studied in the *Evolving partnership* paper. Most are working at the community level to mobilise parents and other local non-government actors to improve conditions and accountability at school level. Similar participatory methodologies are used by most of the NGOs.

On another level, however, NGO programmes differed substantially in terms of their overall strategies and objectives. Some focused on providing services where communities lacked access, while others had schemes offering wider provision than schooling. A third important element that defined the nature of NGO involvement in education was the particular blend of international and national NGOs found within any particular country and programmes they offered.

International NGOs, more than national ones, defined the kind of NGO programmes that existed within a country – a result of the larger resource base on which many international NGOs rely. However, international NGO programmes also tended to influence one another across countries.

Many programmes in the countries chosen are often quite similar and their design has been influenced by the lessons learnt in previous programmes. The differences between the four countries, in terms of political, social and economic realities, provided an explanation of the evolving path of NGO development. The degree of democratic tradition, of political and social stability, and of economic growth shaped what NGOs can and cannot do in a particular country.

A very important factor defining the relationships between NGOs and different actors within a country had simply been the amount of time that NGOs have been involved in the education sector.

How government intervention and NGO experimentation interact

Successful experiments all face the challenge of scaling up. NGOs can experiment because they begin with small pilot programmes, but the goal is to change education for everyone. One way to do this involves seeking funding from major donors and expanding the programmes to encompass more or all of the country. One problem emerging from this approach is that donors generally fund models rather than processes, which can mean that the NGO becomes locked into its own model.

Rather than providing more of the same, scaling up can mean increasing the range and type of NGO activities. This can be evolutionary, as with the international NGO Action Aid. First the NGO focused on building schools, but evaluations suggested that this had less impact than they had anticipated. Next they focused on pedagogy, developing a Freire-influenced approach to literacy and non-formal schooling. This led to creating approaches for breaking down the barriers between formal and non formal schooling. They then began to focus on education policy at national levels. Local NGOs also can follow a process of expansion into new types of activities. CRECCOM in Malawi began its social mobilisation campaigns in the area of girls' education, expanded to address issues of educational quality, and went on to work on HIV/AIDS issues and even has assisted the Ministry of Forestry and Tourism!

A third way that NGOs can expand from small-scale pilot experiments involves influencing the policies and practices of other organisations working in education. In Ethiopia, World Learning allowed government schools in the programmes area to send teachers to their training workshops although the schools were not part of the pilot programmes.

The natural competitiveness among communities can allow ideas to spread from single schools with minimal encouragement. NGOs share ideas among themselves; the best example is probably the immense impact the BRAC programmes in Bangladesh have had on community schools all over Africa. What NGOs have not done is communicate sufficiently what they have learnt from their own experiments. The results of evaluations are generally used to fine tune local programmes, but often go no further. Most NGO publications are geared to soliciting funding rather than sharing exactly what they have done, what obstacles they encountered, and what the result was.

Probably the most powerful way for NGOs to influence education is for governments to adopt their innovations. Mali is a case in which the curriculum model developed by Save the Children for their community schools eventually led to a modification of the national curriculum. To do this successfully NGOs had to demonstrate their results. This may require both research and analysis, targeting both the process and the results, and working with the government to shape how the research is conducted.

In Ethiopia, members of the Ministry of Education conducted their own examinations of six alternative schooling programmes, wrote the case studies themselves, and presented the reports to their colleagues. This process converted those officials to

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the benefits of the NGO approaches they examined more firmly than any publication could have, and their investigations legitimised the findings in the eyes of the government.

During the first few years of the World Learning project in Ethiopia, regional education bureau staff members showed up unannounced at schools where the programme was operating to check things out. But the reports were always positive, and, gradually, the regional government, members of which were always included in the various workshops and training events, saw the programme in a very positive light. Almost all NGOs working in education in Ethiopia offered workshops and presentations for government personnel to illustrate their activities and approaches.

In fact, most NGOs insisted on including local government staff members in any training conducted for their own facilitators or for community members. The Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association, a local NGO working in education, had trouble gaining the confidence of the local education bureau. They addressed the problem by holding workshops, providing a series of field visits for government personnel, and writing reports that described the impact of their activities. Rift Valley personnel visited the local education office frequently and tried to explain in advance any issues that they felt might create misunderstandings.

A number of different international NGOs working in education have organised 'exposure visits' for Ministry of Education and regional education bureau officials to investigate innovative approaches as far away as BRAC schools or as close as local NGOs working within their own region. Action Aid, inspired by the opportunities for NGOs to work within their own countries on national Education For All plans, sponsored a workshop in Ethiopia for NGOs working in education from all over the world. These types of workshops allow NGOs to share their innovations and encourage cross-fertilization of new experiments.

International NGO guidance for local NGOs often includes monitoring their activities. Because local NGOs are often very ambitious, international NGOs help local NGOs organise their activities into manageable tasks and to expand at a reasonable rate. International NGOs have also helped local NGOs to prepare and distribute reports about their activities in education. In Ethiopia, Pact, an international NGO dedicated to NGO capacity building, developed an 'Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool', which was been used with approximately 30 local NGOs to diagnose what type of capacity strengthening was needed. To combat negative perceptions about NGOs, Pact has also worked together with other NGOs in the country to create a Code of Conduct, essentially a statement of operating principles.

What NGOs believe are their responsibilities

NGOs have often established their programmes in those parts of the country where government cannot or will not supply services. NGOs believe that they have a legitimate right to intervene where governments have failed to meet their commitments to communities. In addition, international NGOs seek to empower communities as a way to strengthen them and to improve access and quality of education.

Many NGOs working in education today began through integrated community development programmes, which generally included a literacy component, or sponsorship of children. Working in adult literacy often led them to work with out-of-school children in the same communities.

Some NGOs entered the education sector through social mobilisation, an area where NGOs have worked now for over 50 years. The basic goal of strengthening communities – to assist them to secure needed resources and to participate in the

civil society of their country – continues to influence the types of programmes that NGOs implement in education.

NGOs focus most of their activities in underserved communities not only because this is an area where they are less likely to compete with government, but also because it is where they believe they should be operating anyway.

What has come to define their niche in the education sector is partly the product of where they have seen an absence of government intervention. Clearly as government moves in to areas previously occupied by NGOs, tensions can then arise.

How NGOs work in communities

Most NGOs began working in communities to supply resources, sometimes in the form of disaster relief. Among the NGOs studied by Miller-Grandvaux et al they all brought resources to the communities within which they work. The resources included the supply of concrete, tin roofs to help build schools, and teacher salaries. Local NGOs and their proximity to a community served as a conduit through which resources from donor/international NGO supported programmes flowed to the community. NGOs bring their skills and experience into communities, shaping experiences of change in ways that can provide models for future community activities.

The research found that, initially, most mobilisation or sensitisation campaigns in education focused on encouraging parents to provide resources to create and support educational needs and to send their children, especially girls, to school.

For example, Plan Guinea, an affiliate of Plan International, supported the girls' education unit of the Ministry of Education through several sensitisation campaigns at both national and local levels. Increasingly NGO mobilisation of communities expanded to other areas, such as assisting communities to assume responsibility for improving school quality. The methodologies for working in a community begun to change, moving increasingly away from telling the members of the community what they should do, to involving them in decision-making activities. In Malawi, Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) worked with communities using a wide range of participatory techniques.

This enabling approach was found in Mali, in World Education's programmes, and was based on two hypotheses. First, it asserted that it transformed the nature of parents' associations in Mali enabling them to be more participatory, democratic, accountable, and capable of representing the interests of parents vis-à-vis the education system. Second, it claimed that changing the quality of these associations had a positive impact on school access, quality, and equity.

However, they found that in a similar World Education programme in Guinea participatory approaches only worked with the parents' associations of government schools and not community schools. Alas, the evidence base to explain the two different outcomes in what were very similar programmes is not available.

How government regulation and the community focus of NGOs interact

Government and NGOs can hold compatible beliefs – a point evidenced by the research, which found that government would like NGOs to work with marginal populations or on the periphery of the society. This is where NGOs believe that they should be operating. Governments like NGOs to engage in activities that fall outside the educational domain; most NGOs believe that one of their primary goals should be

to assist and strengthen communities and as a consequence civil society. Programmes that fit within these desires make everyone happy.

In 1994, upon urging from the World Bank, the government of Guinea adopted a new policy for classroom construction. Rather than relying on local entrepreneurs, the Guinean government decided to contract with local NGOs. The Guineans and the World Bank had several reasons for shifting strategies. First, using local entrepreneurs proved to be costly and unreliable. The Government of Guinea and the World Bank believed that local NGOs were more accountable and efficient. Local NGOs were also thought to be capable of mobilising community participation in school construction. Mobilisation meant that communities provided funding or in kind resources to the construction efforts which was welcomed by both the World Bank and the Government.

In Malawi, CRECCOM is a local NGO that grew out of a USAID education project. The Ministry of Education had only good things to say to the researchers and held it up as an example of what an NGO should be. One reason for this high level of accord lies in how CRECCOM had defined its work. CRECCOM believed that what it offered was its methodology for working in communities and that this was valued by Government. Its director, who had worked in the Ministry of Education for 28 years, listed some of the strategies CRECCOM has used to build this acceptance.

He said: '*Never go to the government in the stance of knowing more than they do … Let them take your ideas … Bend your work to complement what the government is doing. Always invite the government to see what you are doing. Invite the government to monitor your programs … Keep allowances lower than those for government employees so as not to be seen as wasteful l… Offer frequent briefing seminars, inviting the government and donors … Use a great deal of publicity.*'

Although it may be argued that his approach is deferential, clearly he used his experience and knew what buttons to press to secure a good working arrangement.

A summary of the NGO/government dynamic described in *Evolving partnerships*:

- Governments channel NGO activities into addressing educational needs that Government does not.
- Governments define partnerships with NGOs. NGOs attempt to operate in areas not reached by government, piggy-back their activities on government programmes, and allow governments to take credit for programmes.
- Governments believe that it is their legitimate right and responsibility to control everything that happens in the country.
- Governments exercise control through requiring licenses to operate,
- NGOs believe that it is their responsibility to improve conditions, including access to and the quality of education, in underserved communities.
- NGOs deliver resources to communities, implement community participation programmes, and train and strengthen school committees and Parent Teacher Associations.
- Government officials insist that they alone should establish the terms of the partnership.

NGO perceptions of government efficiency and government perceptions of NGO skills

NGOs working in education in Africa tend to believe that governments are inefficient in providing access to quality education for all members of the society. Education statistics support this conclusion to some extent. International agencies also often behave as if they have more confidence in NGOs, particularly international ones, than governments. However, governments say that they are not inefficient, but, rather, that they simply do not have enough resources. They argue that they would be as efficient as NGOs if they had as much money to spend on particular projects rather than on the system as a whole.

It is difficult to get even close to the truth as data is not systematically collected let alone analysed. The Literature Review of Africa 2002 is full of examples of partial impact analysis with little or no studies across programme boundaries, let alone the community school/public school divide. The *Evolving partnerships* work found that more efficiency issues arose when NGOs attempted to supply education than when they worked to support government schools through social mobilisation or school committee training. They found that most of the contentious issues revolved around government standards for school construction, teacher qualifications, and curricula.

For many NGOs, creating community schools was a response to the inefficacy of government. Some type of NGO-supported community schools existed in all four countries, but the experience of the community schools created by Save the Children and World Education in Mali with USAID funding provided the most information. With exceptionally low enrolment rates (under 20 per cent in 1990s), large areas of the rural Malian countryside had absolutely no public schools, and one of the worst girls' schooling ratios in the continent. Furthermore, secondary and university students had essentially hijacked the education system with periodic strikes and school closures, making it virtually impossible for government to focus on the needs of basic education stakeholders. Nevertheless, until 1995, community schools in Mali were not registered as institutions of learning; this prevented their pupils from transferring to an equivalent grade in a government school and sitting for the primary school leaver exams.

In Ethiopia, NGO-sponsored community school programmes had sprung up in many parts of the country. Local NGOs had generally initiated these small programmes with support from international NGOs. The government watched these small projects but did not attempt to regulate them. Because they were defined as 'non-formal,' they were considered outside the realm of government responsibility. No consistent policy existed for students from non-formal community schools to continue their education in formal government schools. There was no consistent practice, either transfer or graduation, as to whether or not students who completed programmes would be allowed into formal schools at the appropriate grade level.

In Malawi, religious institutions have a long history of supplying education. However, in 1994, with the election of the new government, these schools were integrated into the national system. Most schools in Malawi were originally built by religious organisations and are still often referred to as 'owned' by specific churches. Faith-based NGOs became increasingly confrontational over teacher posting and the curriculum in the schools they supported. The government curriculum did not include religious education and the Ministry believed all schools must use the state curriculum.

Some of the continuous pressure put on NGO-supported alternative schooling lies in government perceptions of NGO capacity. Governments have hired individuals with training and experience in education to design and manage the country's education system. The Ministries of Education in all four countries run teacher training colleges,

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write curricula, select and hire teachers, and set standards for the entire system through their policies. The Ministries generally perceive the local NGO personnel as individuals with no training or experience in education. However, governments do see international NGOs as having more experience in education, especially when government staff has been hired by the NGOs! Importantly, Millar-Grandvaux et al did find that international NGOs frequently employ local NGOs to implement their programmes without supplying what the government considered sufficient monitoring and supervision.

In some cases they found that local education offices were supervising the local NGO activities, a situation described opportunistically as a partnership by the government and a proof of sustainability by the donors. However it was also found to further sap the time and energy of the already over-extended district education staff. Governments believed that it is their responsibility to maintain quality, standards, and uniformity and often feel that NGOs deliberately ignore government policy. All governments require continued legitimisation through effective provision of services, yet they fear that NGOs could undermine government legitimacy if their provision of education services is seen as superior.

Standards for teacher qualification were found to be a recurrent theme in community schools. Government personnel had a low opinion of most NGO teachers' qualifications and felt that the limited training provided was inadequate. They believed that the formal teacher training of public school teachers not only provides them with the required skills, but also ensures a more mature teacher. In Mali, government school teachers and government officials complained about the quality of teachers in community schools, speaking with derision about the purported 'fact' that they are semi-literate.

A Malian teacher, responding in a seminar where student achievement in public and community schools was compared, declared, 'Are we going to accept that despite our training, our experience, and our membership to the professional teacher corps that these (Community School teachers) are our equals?'

Any discussion of how these less trained teachers could provide an equal level of service is dismissed vehemently. Looking at the *Literature review of community schools in Africa*, the evidence that is available supports higher recruitment and retention rate claims but not higher standards of achievement in community schools.

Government standards and NGO interactions in the supply of education

Save the Children had supplied some educational provision for children in all four of the countries studied in *Evolving partnerships*, and each programme was unique. Although it would be simplistic to reduce the variations in these programmes to a single cause, one difference had been the various governments' position on education standards. In each country, Save the Children redefined its programmes in a context shaped by government standards, its own previous experience, the country's changing history, the type of funding available, and the specific expertise of the local Save the Children staff.

Initially, Save the Children community schools in Mali were designed according to the practice used in Save the Children's integrated development programmes – going into communities and listening to what they were told about the obstacles to education. However, rapid expansion resulted from the publicity of these community schools, pressure on the government to legalise non-government schools, and substantial donor grants to NGOs to support more community schools. The government also saw the community schools as a way to defray expenses and

stretch public budgets, as the communities financed a substantial part of their own schools. At the time of the study there are over 800 Save the Children community schools in Mali, reaching over 48,000 students. Save the Children then said that it could not support more schools and wanted to stop expanding. Improving access to schooling was the initial programmes goal; this was slowly evolving to include improvements in quality.

In Malawi Save the Children began its project with eight pilot schools modelled on the successful community school programmes in Mali. But in 1994 Malawi had its first election and the new government came into power on a platform committed to dropping all school fees. This meant that Save the Children's proposal had been agreed to by one government, but had to be renegotiated with a new government during a period of extreme change in the education sector. The three major innovations of the Save the Children model all conflicted with the new government policy. These were: the reduced Save the Children curriculum, which involved teaching four subjects in the early years and not the eight identified by the new government; the use of local community members as teachers, often with only primary school certificates, as 'paraprofessionals' trained and supervised by Save the Children; and village construction of school buildings, which did not meet the government standards for classroom construction.

The focus shifted from scaling up in the form of operating more schools, as in Mali, to establishing which elements of the Save the Children programmes worked well and might be adopted into the national education system - a different form of scaling up. The major issues that emerged were those of quality, the experimental curriculum, and the methodologies in which the teachers are trained. Save the Children supported over 450 schools but the Ministry of Education had insisted, some said imposed, its standards on both school construction and teacher qualification in those schools.

In Guinea Save the Children originally wanted to establish community schools based on the model it used in Mali. The government, however, did not agree with this approach because it did not want classes to be taught by 'untrained' teachers or for schools to not meet minimal construction standards. Save the Children was, consequently, again obliged to compromise. The government was comfortable with NGO support for parents' associations and school committees, but insisted that Save the Children could not trespass on government domains such as teacher training and curriculum. Save the Children, after negotiations with the government, adopted a model of support that strengthened parent associations, and provided some pedagogical support. As in Malawi, Save the Children shifted from the issue of access to a focus on quality. However the means for having an impact on quality became community strengthening, rather than curriculum and teacher training.

The Save the Children programme in Ethiopia was not funded by a major donor, which made it different from those in Mali, Guinea, and Malawi in a number of ways. The programme was supported by a grant from a small donor, which focused on supporting innovative approaches in education. Grant funding allowed Save the Children to shape its programme to fit the context, rather than responding to a design created by a large donor, based on what the donor thinks the NGO should be doing. Freedom from the constraints imposed by major donors also meant that Save the Children could focus on a process without worrying about time or short-term results. The Save the Children programme in Ethiopia focused on the local NGOs themselves, as potentially major actors in providing education and strengthening civil society. The strategy was clearly to strengthen local NGOs which could then generate new ideas and approaches, and have a long and lasting impact whether or not the international NGOs or donors continued their support.

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Motivation: government suspicion of NGO character/NGO frustration with government limitations

The tensions between government suspicion about what motivates NGOs and NGO frustration with government failure to explore new approaches was found to be a significant issue in the four countries studied by Miller-Grandvaux et al. All governments question the motives of NGOs. The basic concern stemmed from the fact that NGOs are not government – they are private and outside of lines of accountability. The dynamic that then existed as a result of the different perspectives was expressed in a number of ways:

- Governments believed that NGO personnel lacked capacity in pedagogy and curriculum development.
- NGOs believed that governments issued mandates creating educational standards, which limited the types of activities they could implement.
- NGOs believed that they should supply education to populations not reached by the government.
- NGOs believed that they were prepared to adapt their programmes to government standards but governments didn't always incorporate their innovations into the national system.
- NGOs believed that governments were inefficient in providing access to quality education for all members of the society.

In Malawi, local NGOs were frequently perceived as 'opportunistic,' shifting their area of expertise to fit topics currently being funded. In Guinea, this belief was partially an ideological holdover from a previous regime, where government officials had been suspicious of the notion of civil society and believed that these institutions were essentially frauds due to their profit making and entrepreneurship.

Ethiopia, also emerging slowly from a socialist form of government, was suspicious of private enterprise, due to the potential for profit because 'private people own the NGOs.' In addition to these suspicions, the government in Ethiopia perceived local NGOs as possibly involved in hidden political agendas, especially as some NGOs had been created by members of the former government who lost their jobs during the structural adjustment process. Such suspicions may be found in other countries but without good dialogue it is difficult to either support or diffuse the anxieties, and cooperative working both strategically and operationally becomes difficult.

In response to their suspicions about NGO character and motive, governments provided themselves with techniques for monitoring NGO activities and examining what NGOs were doing. Government involvement often went far beyond requiring NGO reporting for accountability. In many cases, government intruded into NGO management – making unexpected visits, demanding who could and could not be hired, insisting on government presence in all NGO activities, taking over projects they thought the NGO was unable to handle, etc.

All governments require some form of reporting from NGOs. When donors fund NGOs, some governments feel that donors focus primarily on monitoring the results of the projects and do not pay adequate attention to financial monitoring. As a result, governments often require extensive financial reporting from NGOs.

The limited travel capacity of most central governments in Africa meant district education offices usually witnessed the work of NGOs. In the countries where data was collected, NGOs tended to have better relationships with the local Government

offices near their projects than with central ministries of education. This did not mean that local government personnel were less suspicious of NGOs generally as they still weren't under government control. In all countries, there was a general belief that NGOs roles would be strengthened as decentralisation became more established. This is a change that, it was believed, would increasingly link NGO activities to local rather than national education systems. However, those at a national rather than local government level were less convinced. They argued that local education personnel generally had more responsibilities than they could handle; governments feared that supervising NGO programmes and attending NGO workshops would further erode their ability to perform their jobs.

Governments believed that NGOs' role should be to deliver the plans created and monitored by the government. Governments do not see NGOs as a resource to test new approaches. Indeed, government officials were concerned with 'duplication' of NGO programmes. One official in Malawi described it like this: 'Lack of tight regulation and monitoring of NGOs has resulted in duplication between government and NGOs and between NGOs themselves.' The notion of a range of experiments attempting to solve problems in different ways seemed to be missing in government perceptions of NGO roles. Although governments often said that they would experiment with innovative programmes if they had the resources to do so, they generally did not.

How governments and non-governmental organisations interact

There were found to be clear tensions between government assumptions about its rights and responsibilities and NGO beliefs about its responsibility to intervene where governments failed to meet these obligations.

Each party acted according to a perception of what they should be doing, which shaped NGO roles as well as the interactions between NGOs and government. Unsurprisingly, some governments allege that development funds are a mechanism for neo-colonialism when they perceive their sovereignty to be compromised. Governments believe that it is ultimately their legitimate right and responsibility to control what happens in their country and there are few countries that wouldn't consider education as the state's responsibility.

The *Evolving partnerships* research found not surprisingly that although government personnel often talked about partnerships with NGOs, they believed that the relationship should be government regulating NGOs. Education is, in part, about social and political control, so government reluctance to allow NGOs to work in this field without regulation is understandable. As a consequence, when NGOs work in this sector, they inevitably require some sort of accommodation with government.

The amount of space allowed to NGOs in any given country is determined by political considerations as well as by any calculation of the contribution of NGOs to economic and social development. The degree to which governments do or do not actually regulate NGOs depends upon their politics, economic situation, and historical relationship with NGOs.

In Africa, a wide range exists in the degree of government determination. In Ethiopia, Yolande Miller-Grandvaux found that the government had deregistered, dissolved, or prevented NGOs from continuing their activities. Many government officials expressed considerable vehemence when discussing circumstances when NGO representatives ignored authority or disregarded regulations. Regardless of the reasons given, in each country the researchers found some tension existed over the legitimacy of NGO interventions.

Although differences exist in degree and techniques, all four governments attempted to control NGO activities. NGOs were required to register in all four countries. In Malawi, the process of registration was slow, difficult and expensive. In Ethiopia the process was complex and not transparent. Governments also enact laws that either deliberately or inadvertently limited NGO freedom of action.

The government in Malawi, for instance, had allowed church NGOs to work in education for decades, but, with democratisation in 1994, international NGOs and local NGOs began to emerge. As one government official said: 'Now there is a need to control them…'

All four countries want to control education activities; however, they realised that they cannot do everything themselves. Aside from the more philosophical concerns regarding the role of government in society and in the education sector, more pragmatic constraints existed – governments do not have the resources necessary to deliver the depth or scope of education coverage required. One reason the NGOs were allowed to function in certain regions or take on certain educational activities was because the government could not do so themselves, because of structural adjustment and/or economic crisis. Governments anywhere find it hard to admit that they cannot fill all the gaps. One way governments can feel that they are meeting their responsibilities and yet let NGOs take on some education burdens is for the government to limit NGO programmes by directing where geographically, and what type of activities, NGOs can operate.

For example, researchers found that the licensing process in Ethiopia tightly controlled the district in which each NGO had permission to work. When Save the Children first began its community school programmes in Mali, it was told by the government to set up its pilot schools on the periphery of the country, far away from centres of power and in regions that are difficult and expensive for the government to reach.

The governments in all four countries expressed preferences for NGO involvement in education-related activities not generally considered to be part of government responsibility. Most educational systems run from the central Ministry of Education, through regional and district offices, to the school, but do not extend to the community beyond the school.

Consequently, NGOs are almost always encouraged to engage in social mobilisation or 'sensitisation' programmes, an activity usually beyond the scope of government responsibility. Many, and possibly most, NGO programmes in education have been designed to support formal education through community mobilisation or school committee and PTA training. Because governments tend to focus on broader access to education, they are also usually more willing to let NGOs grapple with issues such as girls' education and quality of education.

In some countries governments have standards with which NGOs must comply. Government standards for teacher recruitment and teacher training, and for selecting the schools to receive support, have influenced NGO programmes. Some of the standards are open to interpretation and can be constraining, rather than improving quality. The domains where NGOs are most constrained by the government are meeting the standards for school construction, curricula, teacher qualifications, and, less frequently, school committee or parent membership.

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Motivation: the dynamics of government and NGO beliefs

- Governments suspect local NGO motives are dishonest or opportunistic, and international NGOs may advance foreign ideas.
- Governments intervene in NGO governance, monitor their activities, and have taken over NGO programmes.
- Governments do study NGO performance and have relaxed policy restrictions, and investigated innovations introduced by NGOs.
- NGOs attempt to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programmes, create self monitoring guidelines, and include government personnel in their training.
- NGOs believe that governments cannot and/or will not experiment with new and innovative approaches to the supply of education.

A condition built into the Sector Investment Programmes in Ethiopia required that the Ministry of Education investigate the possibilities of alternative education. Members of the planning office carried out this research and produced six case studies of alternative education programmes, five of them run by NGOs. In part because they conducted the research themselves, they became supporters of alternative approaches to education. The Ministry of Education evaluation of community schools made the NGO approaches credible to the government because, as one government official pointed out, 'no one believes what NGOs say'.

In practically all cases, international NGOs have been at the forefront of trying to influence national education policy or the policy process. However, in Guinea, local and national NGOs have been completely absent from the policy arena. In Mali, national NGOs played an important role in the Groupe Pivot, but Save the Children and World Education were the driving force of the campaign in that country to change policies regarding community schools. In Ethiopia, Action Aid and Pact supported local NGOs in efforts to change local curriculum policy. In Malawi, national NGOs were part of a coalition of national and international NGOs and the Alliance which included NGOs, donors and government.

Changing specific policies

Education policies supported by NGOs can be categorised in many ways. Some policies are set at a national level with highly significant implications for the overall education system, such as adopting a new curriculum, or changing the status of a certain type of school. Others are more modest, affecting educational practice in a particular region or locality, such as giving a specific community school a local license to operate, or allowing a local NGO to function in a particular jurisdiction. Examples of policy change in the four counties studied are as follows.

Mali

In Mali, community schools were practically synonymous with NGOs in the education sector. From their inception, however, the role and place of community schools in the education sector has been contentious. Every aspect of community schools has been the subject of intense policy debate in Mali, from the curriculum to the qualification of teachers to the status of their pupils.

Fundamentally, government policy at the outset indicated that community schools were non-formal education institutions, conveying no right or opportunity for pupils to continue their education in public schools. As community schools proliferated, the NGOs that supported them had a clear interest in having government accept these

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children into formal primary schools or secondary schools. However, government officials expressed the position that these schools did not provide the same quality and content of education as government-sponsored primary education.

Furthermore, government and community schools conflicted over curriculum policy. One of the government's principal criticisms of community schools was that they used a streamlined curriculum and Bambara as the language of instruction for the first three grades. Government authorities argued that, as a consequence, children were not being prepared to transfer to equivalent grades levels or to take the leavers' exam for which French is the official language used. This argument was used by government officials as one of the principal reasons why community schools could not have equity with public primary schools.

Save the Children and the Centre National d'Education engaged in a process of collaboration to modify the curriculum used in community schools and the problem was resolved.

Guinea

One very serious education issue in Guinea was the shortage of teachers. In Guinea, almost every rural school in the country did not have enough teachers. In the most extreme cases, recently built schools were not opened because they had no teachers.

As part of government efforts to address this shortage, contract teachers had been hired subsequent to training and deployed throughout the country. Nonetheless, the government was not able to attract enough people to become contract teachers and many quit after one or two years of service. In addition, many refused or found ways to avoid deployment to isolated rural schools.

Save the Children agreed that it would apply government construction standards, use the government's curriculum, and hire government teachers. In this sense, Save the Children did not succeed in changing educational policy in Guinea, as they did in Mali. However, as a precondition to starting its programmes, the government agreed to provide teachers to schools Save the Children built and supported.

Plan International had an extensive education support programme in the N'Zérékouré region of Guinea, where local government authorities received conditioned annual grants for either primary education or primary health services. Because of the teacher shortage, many local governments used their grant to hire community teachers. Plan International supported these teachers through training and other pedagogical services. Plan was also instrumental in raising community school teachers' salaries over government contract teachers. Although the Ministry of Education was not informed of the decision to use community teachers, local education officials agreed and even participated in recruiting them.

In summary, local authorities instituted a policy change to hire additional teachers and to pay a premium; and these changes were made as a consequence of Plan's involvement in the education sector. One interesting commonality of these examples is that in no case did NGOs start their programmes with the objective of changing government policy.

Approaches

World Education in Guinea and Mali and Action Aid, Oxfam, and CARE in Malawi, typify contrasting approaches to attempting to change the policy process. For World Education, the key to greater participation was transforming parents' associations into more representative and organised civil society organisations that could then demand greater accountability from school directors and teachers at the school level and other education officials at higher levels of the education system. In both countries, World Education's programmes have focused on this transformation, promoting the election of new parents' association leaders, aiding in establishing

bylaws, and providing training for all members. In a subsequent phase, World Education aimed to establish more representative parents' association federations as a way of engaging in the policy process at higher levels of the system.

The Action Aid, Oxfam, and CARE approach to changing the policy process started from the other end. Their analysis of the education policy led them to conclude that much education reform is not successful because it is set by consultants hired by donors and the top officials in education and finance ministries without engaging the public. In Malawi, they helped to create a coalition of national and international NGOs and other civil society organisations, teacher unions and church groups, whose purpose was to advocate for better quality and access. The Coalition took on a confrontational strategy to gain a seat at the policy table. They published critical articles in newspapers and distributed tracts espousing that the Ministry of Education was not doing its job to ensure that teachers were paid well and received appropriate training. Ministry officials expressed their irritation with their tactics and although the coalition began to have some access to different policy forums (for example, they made a presentation to the parliament), they did not succeed in changing the policy agenda.

This confrontational approach was too much for Action Aid, which decided to leave the coalition and join another group of NGOs (NGO-Government Alliance for Basic Education-The Alliance) that included government and donor representatives. They did this for two reasons. First, they were uncomfortable with the more confrontational tactics, but ironically, they believed that international NGOs were over-represented within the coalition and were driving both agenda and strategy. This is interesting because the Coalition's objective was to create a non-governmental Malawian force that could contest and argue policy positions.

The donor perspective

Donors finance NGO education activities because they share similar education priorities and goals. Not surprisingly, NGOs that receive support from donors share their policy agenda and advocate for similar policies.

In both Ethiopia and Mali, USAID and international NGOs financed by USAID have worked together to support policy change that protects and encourages community schools. In Guinea, USAID worked closely with Save the Children to change government policy regarding teacher deployment.

In general, there were only a few examples of NGOs and donors working at cross purposes in terms of education policy. Usually, when donors and NGOs did not share the same policy objectives, those NGOs had independent sources of funding. By paying community school teachers more than the government provides contract teachers, Plan International pursued a teacher policy different than that supported by the World Bank, and by extension, other donors in Guinea.

The NGO coalition in Malawi pursued an education policy agenda to elevate teacher pay and conditions, which are not high priorities amongst donors. More importantly, the coalition also targeted government policy towards donors, claiming that the answer to many education issues would be through debt relief and the reversal of certain structural adjustment measures.

In Malawi, donors' representatives were somewhat irritated by the coalition, but more for its tactics than its agenda. Donors have less tolerance for NGOs that pursue a separate policy agenda with their funding.

Negotiations between World Education and USAID in Mali in 1995 provided an interesting case in this regard. World Education's programmes essentially have civil society objectives. It aims to increase community and civil society involvement in

education decision-making throughout the education system. Thus World Education targeted parents' associations of both public and community schools. During negotiations, USAID insisted that World Education focus solely on community schools and abandon support to parents' associations of public schools.

Although World Education continued to support those public school parents' associations that had been in their programmes, no new public sector parents' associations received funding under the new programmes.

Essentially, USAID's education policy agenda indicated that community schools were the privileged vehicle for system expansion and that resources for public schools should be limited.

Teacher unions

This stakeholder is usually neglected by donors and international NGOs, and is often construed as a constraint to policy change and educational improvement.

Of all actors interviewed in Mali and Guinea by the researchers union representatives exhibited the most animosity towards NGOs and their attempts to influence education policy.

For these stakeholders, NGOs were clearly a destructive force that was undoing the public education system. NGOs (both national and international) were usually equated with donors.

They were considered to have no legitimacy working in the education system and by extension in the education policy arena. International or national NGOs working in the education sector in Mali and Guinea did not have any relations with teachers' unions. They appeared in some of the same forums and meetings but rarely engaged in discussion or common actions.

In Malawi, Action Aid, Oxfam, and CARE took a diametrically opposed tack with unions. The Coalition had specifically asked the Malawian teachers union to join its endeavour. Also, the initial policy agenda set by the Coalition was essentially the same as that of the national union—better conditions and pay for teachers.

Coalition building

In several countries, coalition building has been used as a way to leverage change and also engage in policy dialogue. Here again Mali provides a prime example.

The creation of the Groupe Pivot, an NGO consortium, was extremely important to push forward the community school agenda, a strength that certainly came from numbers. The Groupe Pivot was initially established with support from the Federation of NGOs in Mali. It was part of a more general effort to organise the NGO field. At first, the Groupe Pivot was essentially a 'talk shop', where representatives from interested local and international NGOs would discuss a particular chosen theme. The Groupe Pivot obtained financing from Save the Children and USAID for operations and then took on the advocacy role for community schools.

However, the Groupe Pivot experience also demonstrated the difficulties of coalitions. After having won the fight for community schools, the Groupe Pivot's effectiveness as an organisation began to decline. Leadership changed and also became more dispersed as key members received invitations to participate in one international conference after another. Essentially, coalition maintenance requires substantial attention and resources.

The coalition made a fatal mistake when, upon donor urging, it began to act as a clearing house for donors who wanted to contract NGOs for their programmes. Although effective as an advocacy group and talk shop, it was not prepared to manage contracts. Eventually, because of accusations of mishandling of funds, the credibility of the Groupe Pivot was undermined. It continued to exist but with very little importance for the education NGO landscape.

The attempt of several international NGOs to create a coalition of NGOs in Malawi was quite different. From the beginning, the coalition adopted a more adversarial posture towards government and donors than the Groupe Pivot. Although the consortium in Malawi has not had the devastating managerial issues faced by the Groupe Pivot, the fact that it split into an Alliance and a Coalition indicates that efforts to institutionalise a national civil society front vis-à-vis the education system is difficult to sustain.

Using donors to leverage policy

USAID and the World Bank have always championed community schools in Mali. The lion's share of their assistance was funnelled towards community schools, with little left for the public school system. Working in tandem with the Groupe Pivot these large and influential donors placed pressure on the Mali government to create a more advantageous environment for community schools.

Many education officials in Mali had opposed the community schools funded by USAID and delivered by Save the Children from the outset. However, the proliferation of community schools proceeded so quickly that education officials were obliged to accommodate and control them rather than prevent them from growing. In addition, four other major international donors and NGOs (World Education, UNICEF, Africare, and CARE) all supported community schools which enrolled approximately 25 percent of the children in Mali. This obviously provided the basis for substantial policy leverage.

In many cases, evidence of the effectiveness of NGO programmes was found to have influenced policy. Usually, however, demonstration projects had been used in conjunction with other approaches to leverage decision-making. As NGOs conducted policy dialogue or mobilised advocates (donors or other partners) to pressure government, being able to point to irrefutable programme success (particularly in comparison to government efforts) was a strong argument.

In Mali, the government and Save the Children conducted an evaluation of the effectiveness of community schools. This evaluation demonstrated that the children attending community schools achieved the same levels of competency as those in public schools.

Though many different parties within the education establishment protested these results, it nevertheless convinced many officials that community schools must be included in the formal education system. Demonstration projects, however, were also shown to increase the defensiveness of government officers to the detriment of the cause.

Again, in Mali, community school evaluation results, when presented to a large group of teachers in the Koulikoro region, were met with uproar and anger. The teachers' reactions were so strong that the meeting ended prematurely. Fundamentally, the problem was presentation; the message communicated was that the community school teachers were responsible for the success in these schools and by extension public school teachers were responsible for the respective failure of public schools.

Partnership and policy

NGOs have actively sought partnership as a strategy to change policy. The following three examples were provided in *Evolving partnerships* to contrast how partnerships were developed and the impact that they had.

Mali

In Mali, government officials protested the curriculum Save the Children used in community schools, which led Save the Children to contract with the Centre National de d'Education to develop a modified educational programme. The process of collaboration between the two helped realign perspectives and lessened the education officials' opposition to the community school approach. In this case, the NGO sought a technical relationship with government officials to resolve a policy difference. By doing so, an ideological difference was eventually resolved as a technical issue.

Guinea

In Guinea, Plan International's programme was, by its very nature, a partnership between government and NGO. Plan made grants to local government to implement its education agenda. This relationship between government and NGO was probably the most integrated of any NGO programmes studied. The overall aim of the programme was to enable local authorities to prioritise and meet education and health needs.

Malawi

In Malawi, the Alliance grew out of the Coalition because some actors were uncomfortable with its confrontational strategy. A defining characteristic of the Alliance was that it included government and donor representatives. Although Guinea, Mali, and Ethiopia had institutional mechanisms of varying degrees of formality and permanence in place that brought together government, donors, and NGOs, the Malawian Alliance was the first such case that was initiated and piloted by NGOs.

Each partnership was formed to address a very different policy concern. In Mali, the partnership was needed to transform a political problem into a technical issue that could be resolved. In Guinea, partnership represented a way to underwrite the decentralisation of educational decisions. In Malawi, partnership was used to implement a particular strategy for changing the education policy process. However, a key commonality of these three types of partnership is that they are all financed by NGOs.

NGOs and donors

The type of arrangement which defines much of the financing of national NGOs by donors is as follows.

Donors contract with international or well established national NGOs to finance the activities of smaller national NGOs. Most USAID-financed programmes in all four countries included a similar arrangement. In Ethiopia, both World Learning and Pact used local NGOs to implement aspects of their programmes. This was also a signature approach of all of World Education's programmes. In Guinea, the World Bank first had contracted with individual NGOs to construct schools. In the new programmes that followed, the government contracted ten international and large national NGOs to mediate the work with local NGOs.

As an overall field, contractual relations between donors and international NGOs have become more formal over time although historically, education initiatives were at first developed by NGOs using their own resources. Then, many NGOs approached donors requesting resources either to mainstream pilot projects or for continuation funding for programmes (for example, Aide et Action in Guinea, Save the Children and World Education in Mali, Save the Children in Malawi). This also occurred internationally, as programmes in one country served as a model for another (for example, Save the Children in Mali and Guinea).

NGOs' successes in education sector activities led donors to ask NGOs to develop similar programmes. This was the case in Mali, in particular, as donors were all interested in the idea of community schools. NGOs, seeing this opportunity, began proposing education programmes to donors. In the last instance, donors have increasingly used competitive tendering between NGOs as a basis for allocating programmes and resources.

The history of World Education programmes in support of parents' associations typifies this evolution. First, World Education developed its programmes in Mali working with parents' associations in Bamako with World Bank support. World Education then submitted an unsolicited proposal to the USAID mission to expand the programmes which were renegotiated twice. World Education then approached USAID missions in other countries with other unsolicited proposals, offering to replicate the Mali model.

This increased formalisation of relations had certain implications for the shape of NGO education programmes. First, donors had a clearer understanding of the role they believed NGOs should play in their education programmes. By tendering programmes with well-delineated results and approaches, donors knew exactly what to expect from the programmes. However, one unintended consequence of 'clarity' was that NGOs become less innovative and experimental, which had been a common justification for their use.

Programmes: the need for results

Donors turned to NGOs because they believed them to be either more effective or to have greater reach into underserved communities than did governments.

This was usually expressed both in terms of the governments' limited capacity and NGOs' particular characteristics. Second, donor representatives indicated that often it was easier to work with NGOs than with government or contractors to obtain the same result. Third, some donors appreciated the NGOs' ability to innovate and experiment. Finally, some donors claimed that using NGOs fulfilled a mandate as the use of national NGOs in particular was construed as a way to reinforce civil society.

According to most donors, they used NGOs to implement their programmes mostly because they had achieved more measurable results more efficiently than government. NGOs were generally able to accomplish the same results less expensively than government, because they achieved lower unit costs and experienced less wastage. Also, NGOs tended to meet deadlines more reliably than governments when both were contracted to implement the same programmes.

Donors, however, have not abandoned governments or the possibility that government services can be improved. They continued to target the capacity of government to provide educational services and to use government channels to deliver everything from teacher training to textbooks to construction. No donor implements its programmes solely through NGOs.

In addition, donors recognised certain limitations to NGO implementation of their programmes. Whereas NGOs were often the preferred provider for construction,

distribution of goods and services at community levels and 'social mobilisation', donors continued to work mostly with governments on issues of pedagogical reform (curriculum change, textbook development) and on teacher training.

NGOs were chosen over governments because they had a number of inherent characteristics that enabled them to act in ways government cannot. Their capacity to work at a local level to mobilise communities to support schools appears to be the most prized attribute.

Few donors, however, appeared to have thought through the long-term implications of having NGOs rather than government services implement certain aspects of their programmes. Although most governments have come to accept that NGOs have a certain comparative advantage in chosen domains, no donor indicated what the 'future place' of NGOs should be.

Although donor representatives have expressed some concern about issues of sustainability and have often insisted on exit strategies, most have been framed in terms of how communities might take over the programmes rather than government, which is unrealistic. In countries where decentralisation is occurring, this tack might have a little bit of promise.

However, even in these cases, community and local government capacity to step in at the same level of cost-effectiveness and deliver the same level of results cannot be assumed. Essentially, by framing the role of NGOs as an agent that can do what government is not capable or expected to do, donors have limited the potential involvement of NGOs in education and have even closed off certain avenues for sustainability.

If NGOs are restricted to the delivery of education services rather than to support innovation, improvement and development of existing government services, then there is little scope for their continuation in the longer term. On the contrary, once governments are able to take over delivery, they no longer have a role to play.

When civil society objectives meet education objectives

Donors claim other reasons for using NGOs in the education sector. The most common rationale is greater school accountability to parents. However, an ongoing tension exists between the twin objectives of educational quality and equitable access on the one hand and greater involvement of civil society in overseeing public services on the other. This tension is sometimes bureaucratically translated within donor agencies and between donors and NGOs.

For example, the development assistance agenda of USAID missions is defined by strategic objectives and groups of agency officials are organised to develop overall strategies, design projects, and monitor results in specific development sectors. In the case of NGO involvement within the education sector, education strategic objective teams have usually taken the lead.

However, democracy and governance teams have also invested in these activities, as they relate to the development of civil society. A key part of most civil society goals held by democracy and governance programmes is to create, strengthen, and sustain organisations that can represent the interests of citizen's vis-à-vis government and can respond to public needs alongside government.

Donors appear to see many opportunities for synergy when they pursue both education and civil society objectives. This synergy, however, has not often manifested itself and certainly is not a view that is shared by many African

governments and the World Education programmes in Mali was the only case of a project jointly financed by two different parts of USAID.

Differing perspectives on strengthening civil society

All international NGOs saw their role as more than a conduit for resources to disadvantaged communities and/or influencing national education policies. International NGOs generally ground their role in empowerment. Some international NGOs see developing civil society as a main objective, while others are less interested in building civil society for its own sake than as a means to an end, such as improving education.

More and better education can, in itself, improve citizens' capacity to build networks of responsibilities and rights that constitute a strong civil society. Increasing local involvement in the institutions that support education – structures of civil society – can strengthen the organisations themselves. But this difference in emphasis can also lead to a lack of clarity in funding streams and in determining impact.

In the literature on NGO involvement in education two rationales appear for why NGOs are selected to implement programmes. One is the familiarity of NGOs with involvement on a local, community level. The other is the role NGOs are believed to play in strengthening civil society.

The prevailing view among donors is that African nations will not experience sustainable change without being transformed into more democratic societies. Donors generally assume that the process of democratisation is linked to a civil society because the nature of democratic systems calls for broad based participation. Civil society, the configuration of social relations, institutional roles, and rights and obligations through which the people of a country have a means for influencing those who rule, can provide the structure for a participatory, democratic society. Although a stronger civil society should be able to control government actions, governments are not necessarily opposed to strengthening civil society. Having the institutions of modern society – media, unions, professional organisations and universities – is modern and how African governments would like to be seen.

In addition, governments in Africa tend to see civil society as linked to a modernisation process where modern citizens will take greater responsibility for improving their lives – a process believed to promote economic development. This view of civil society is appealing to the government because the process unburdens the state and reduces some of its responsibilities toward its citizens. In general, governments have been somewhat unaware of the community empowerment efforts of international NGOs and they do not and did not see stronger communities as a threat. Rather, they believed that NGO activities will increase community contribution of resources, which will ease government responsibility.

Miller-Grandvaux et al found that governments, donors, and international NGOs all believed that the NGOs working in education could have a direct impact on community empowerment. From the government perspective, the impact of NGOs on civil society was generally construed as an 'awakening' of communities to the importance of schooling. Sensitisation campaigns and social mobilisation programmes generally begin with the assumption that communities must be convinced of the benefits of education for all children, especially for girls. And everyone seems to agree that one of the most important successes of NGOs working in education has been increased access to education. Even the choice to send more children to school can create more active involvement in monitoring local schooling.

In Evolving Partnerships several NGOs reported that sponsorship programmes led villagers to question local leaders about the lack of money directed to the school and

decisions about management of school. Asking community members to contribute to improving the school creates a sense of ownership that can change community attitude. Although most NGOs in the study claim to be participatory, little consensus existed about what participation means in practice. The initial stage of most NGO programmes did involve consulting the communities by using participatory techniques to identify and prioritise their education problems, assess possible options and opportunities to solve these problems, and select strategies. Nevertheless, NGOs in most cases retained most decision-making power and sometimes used participation to achieve its own goals.

In Mali, the objective of both World Education and Save the Children programmes was to create viable civil society organisations at the community level. Save the Children's community school programmes in Mali were designed to resemble the BRAC model: providing four years of schooling to a cohort of students, graduating them, and then beginning again with a new cohort of students who would receive four years of education.

However, the communities, who had been told that they 'owned' the schools, objected to the next stage of plans. If they owned the school, then they believed that they should be able to dictate the learning structure, and they did not want their children to stop their education at four years. Save the Children explained that teachers who teach French after the fourth grade were not available, but the community said they would find a way to pay to bring such teachers to 'their' school, a priority not shared by Save the Children.

Strengthening civil society through local NGOs

Donors expect that NGOs will foster democracy because they can strengthen local institutions as civic actors, enabling them to link horizontally and vertically into mass movements that will provide organised countervailing power to the state. Donors and international NGOs believe that supporting local NGO involvement in education will increase the sustainability of programmes. The major goal in strengthening local NGOs is to build organisations that will continue to work to expand and improve education whether or not donors or international NGOs remain.

In Ethiopia, Action Aid, Save the Children, and Pact, operating from somewhat different philosophies and funding sources, have all supported local NGOs in delivering their existing or planned education activities. Some funding came from the 'Learning for Leverage in Education' project supported by Banyan Tree. The project was designed to address unmet basic education needs. This they believed was possible by strengthening education NGOs in five countries in East Africa through capacity building.

The goals include stimulating basic experimentation by local NGOs, strengthening local NGO capacity in basic education, and widening the influences of local NGO experience on national education efforts. The support consisted of long-term grants to international NGOs to build capacity of local NGOs, a series of annual sub grants to local NGOs to fund their education activities, international NGO training and technical assistance for local NGO staff, personnel exchanges and workshops among the international and local NGO staff members to share experience, and periodic cross-site evaluations to synthesise findings.

Because, in Africa, small, local NGOs are difficult to reach directly, one international NGO took the lead in each country. In Ethiopia, Save the Children worked with ten local NGOs to encourage them to explore new ways to work that were effective and appropriate. Capacity building involves long-term mentoring, not single courses, and one problem with the Banyan Tree approach was that the selection of small emerging

NGOs with limited programmes and organisational capacity spread across wide areas limited their ability to influence educational policy and civil society.

The cost of these resources — reporting and other administrative tasks

Aside from competing objectives and priorities, NGOs must also respond to donor demands for accountability. USAID seems to have the most extensive demands for accountability of the donors surveyed by Miller-Grandvaux et al. In fact, international and national NGOs' representatives indicated that they spend anywhere from 10–25 per cent of their management time reporting to USAID on the results of their work. Many NGOs also reported that the administrative demands of donors have increased over time.

Donors usually expect two types of reporting from NGOs: financial and programmatic. Donors typically want NGOs to adopt accepted accounting practices with appropriate book-keeping practices, paper trails, and regular audits. Donor agencies are accountable to home offices, and have elaborate bureaucratic controls in place to manage financial resources and avoid financial scandals or ambiguity.

Representatives from several national NGOs that have multiple funding sources listed USAID as having the most onerous and difficult financial management standards. Rigorous financial controls mean that only those NGOs that have USAID accredited financial systems can have access to resources. Several national NGOs in Mali complained that working directly with USAID was virtually impossible; they must use an intermediary. Aside from the time it takes, programme related reporting had, it was claimed, an insidious impact on programme development or evolution.

The reporting demands tended to privilege international NGOs over local NGOs on several accounts. International NGOs such as Save the Children or World Education have developed systems to meet the accountability requirements of US AID that can be imported from one country to another.

Most expatriate staff had already substantial experience with USAID-funded projects and may have even received training in how to manage reporting requirements. Few national NGOs had the institutional capacity to manage these burdens and were often taken by surprise.

CRECCOM, a well-established local NGO in Malawi, reported that early in their relationship with USAID a major difficulty was how money was released to them. Initially, they received money on a monthly basis and could not get the next month's funding until they had accounted for all monies received. Without reserves and the necessary accounting experience the programme was, it was claimed, put at risk.

Creating NGO networks

Strengthening communities without linking them to other organisations is not sufficient for promoting civil society. Similarly, local NGOs will be strengthened if they are linked to each other. A range of different experiences with NGO networks and alliances were identified in the countries involved in the research by Miller-Grandvaux et al. In some cases, civil society institutions had resisted the activities of NGO networks.

For example, in Mali and Guinea, teacher unions developed an intense animosity toward international and national NGOs. Yet, in Malawi, the teachers union was an active member of a strong NGO network. The relationships with governments are also varied in different networks, running from government-created NGO umbrella

organisations used to control NGOs, to NGO networks that include the government as a member facilitating understanding, to NGO networks that were confrontational.

In Ethiopia, The Basic Education Network (BEN) was established to promote alternative education programmes and to allow NGOs working in education to collaborate and share information. The network was primarily supported by two international NGOs, Save the Children and Pact, but had also received assistance from Action Aid, Redd Barna, and World Learning. BEN lacked a telephone, email, a vehicle, copiers, and so on, but its biggest problem was that government regulations prevent it from registering, which meant it was not legal. BEN solved the problem by locating itself within a local NGO that was registered, the Adult and Non-formal Education Association of Ethiopia (ANFEAE).

In Mali, The Groupe Pivot is a consortium of NGOs that came together initially out of a shared interest in the education sector. The Groupe later obtained financing from USAID and Save the Children and became an advocate for community schools. Groupe Pivot engaged in policy dialogue with national officials and presented a common front to influence changes in policy. Its big policy change success was getting the government to expand community schools. But Groupe Pivot started having problems after two major events.

Once community schools were incorporated into the education system the consortium did not have a clear advocacy agenda. As a consequence, they could not agree on a reason to exist. This led to the decision to contract with donors as an intermediary for local NGOs. Groupe Pivot lacked the mandate, experience, and expertise to assume this type of activity and their management of activities led to accusations of mishandling of funds. Over time the Group's importance and effectiveness in education declined.

In Malawi a number of different NGO network approaches have emerged in recent years. The NGO-Government Alliance for Basic Education emerged when a number of NGOs worked together to advocate for education policy changes. According to government officials, the relationship between NGOs and government was at an all time low when the Alliance formed. The Alliance decided to extend membership to the government to ensure that the government saw them as a partner and not an opponent.

A local NGO headed the Alliance, but its formation was facilitated by the international NGO Action Aid. The Alliance believed that its role was to bring government closer to NGOs and foster a new relationship and understanding between the government and NGOs working in education. The Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education – 'The Coalition' grew out of the international NGO Oxfam's focus on advocacy as part of its global campaign for education for all.

The Coalition lobbied the Ministry of Education and Parliament and won recognition for their priorities in education. Although the Teachers Union of Malawi often represented the Coalition, CARE International heads the organisation. Coalition members believe that 'confrontation is how it works,' a philosophy that has made it unpopular with the government and may have contributed to the restrictions on NGOs imposed by the NGO laws in Malawi.

The Teachers Union of Malawi and the other Coalition members believe that advocacy targets government and, consequently, government should not be a member. The Coalition believes that it cannot include the government because 'it has to be strong in itself to come to government'.

The Ministry of Education was concerned with NGOs trying to operate 'on [the same] level with the government'. Action Aid believed that NGOs needed to work with government as a partner and has remained a member of the more conservative and Malawian NGO dominated NGO-Government Alliance. These two NGO networks use very different approaches to advocacy for policy change and their differences have

polarised the NGO community in the education sector. Attempts to bring the two together have met with little success.

When the Coalition advocated for its education priorities with the Ministry of Education a member of the Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) presented the Coalition's position. They argued for the budget priority to be for educating teachers, teaching and learning materials, and improving teacher salaries and conditions. That approach was considered to be simply an interest group lobbying.

Summary of government and NGO interaction

- Government and NGO representatives tend to have contrasting assumptions about their respective rights and responsibilities in the education sector.
- Government and NGOs hold differing notions of the capacity each possesses to provide adequate educational services.
- They hold distinctly different perceptions of what motivates and limits the educational activities each undertakes.
- Governments in each country studied saw themselves as the principal actor accountable for education development and this fact shaped the role that could and should be played by NGOs. The role and interventions of NGOs in the education sector are both legitimate affairs of government.
- NGO officials, on the other hand, view their intervention through an entirely different lens. They see themselves as filling in gaps by government either in development needs or in provision for specific communities. They then have a role in mobilising the resources and actors necessary to meet this urgent need. Because they fill in these gaps and because they often offer provision in underserved communities, they see themselves as motivated by a moral purpose.
- This difference of perspective manifests itself into different types of behaviour. In all cases, government officials translate their perspective into actions that aim to regulate the interventions and scope of activity of NGOs. NGOs are intervening in an area for which government is ultimately accountable.
- International and local NGOs will work where they see the most need, and this tends to be with the most disadvantaged communities. NGOs have supplied resources directly to these communities (schools, teachers, and pedagogical supplies), implemented community participation and provided capacity building to local institutions (ie parents' associations and school committees).
- The interaction of these two perspectives has defined NGO-government relations along a continuum. In the least collaborative cases, government reacts to NGO interventions as trespassing and an affront to government sovereignty.
- NGOs, on the other hand, treat government as a constraint to be ignored or avoided in order to meet what they perceive to be their moral crusade.
- Under a more collaborative scenario, governments welcome NGO activity where it is unable to intervene, such as at the community level.
- NGO-government relations have tended to resemble the least collaborative end of the spectrum at earlier stages and have evolved to a more collaborative point along this continuum. Government and NGOs hold contrasting beliefs regarding their respective abilities.
- As a consequence, government officials tend to judge the quality of NGO staff against the defined official qualifications. When such qualifications do not exist, they often insist on some form of monitoring and evaluation.

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- On the other hand, government action is motivated by the interests of the citizenry. For NGOs, governments are conservative and cautious and view all innovations as challenges to vested interests. They view their own interventions as innovative and unshackled from unnecessary bureaucracy.
- In the least collaborative case, government officials view NGOs as profiteers, fraudsters, and harbourers of subversives. NGOs, in this scenario, view government officials as probably corrupt bureaucrats who have no interest in promoting change in disadvantaged areas.
- These mutual characterisations are not usually informed by much true knowledge of either side. Exposure usually breeds familiarity and softens suspicions. At local levels, NGO and government have more quickly found it necessary to collaborate and even become interdependent.
- Forums and regular meetings, even of a symbolic nature, appear to contribute to changing prejudices.
- Some NGOs, primarily international NGOs, see changing the policy process as part of their mandate. They believe that education would be better if different stakeholders were brought into the picture. NGO participation in education policy has tended to follow a particular progression. NGOs engage in activities to improve access.
- Ideally, the advocates use the best data and analysis possible and enable all relevant stakeholders to participate in the deliberations or at least have their perspective considered. This strategy is clearly the method of choice at both national and local levels. In almost all countries, international and national NGOs have attempted to develop better ties with education officials.
- Coalition building has been used to leverage change and to engage in policy dialogue. Bringing together different NGOs and other stakeholders to present a common front to government has usually been quite effective. However, maintaining these coalitions has proven to be very difficult.
- Using donors to leverage policy is a common strategy used by a variety of NGOs. Because many NGO programmes are financed by bilateral and international donors, they often engage in policy discussions between government and NGOs in order to resolve implementation problems of varying scale.
- Evidence of NGO programmes' effectiveness can influence policy. Pilot programmes have been used to leverage decision-making. As NGOs conduct policy dialogue or mobilise advocates (donors or other partners) to pressure government, being able to point to irrefutable evidence of success is certainly important.
- The availability of such evidence is variable and usually limited to only one or two quality indicators. The concept of value for money is little used.

There is no doubt that tension exists between the community school movement in Africa and the Ministry of Education Public schools. A number of reasons can be put forward to explain this tension; one of the factors is accountability. The community schools movement sets out at the grass roots level to create and support a degree of accountability to the local community which often explains the better recruitment and retention rates but is also said to contribute to a narrower curriculum than public schools.

Accountability differs also at the macro level as the community school and the public school are part of two different systems and critically the bodies that are responsible for policy and finance for community schools are invariably not part of the state. Another factor which can lead to tension stems from the pluralistic character of the schools and the impact the pursuit of various agendas can have on the state, particularly the development of civil society.

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Implications for ICECS

NGOs are a major factor in the implementation of educational programmes. Largely, state, NGO and donors accommodate each other's actions. There appears to be tacit acceptance of their different roles but not a long term strategy that envisions all parties playing an ongoing role. Disharmony appears to be the norm.

However, for community schools the danger lies in the fact that most state education policies either do not believe in that approach and/or are ambivalent to the integration of community schools into their overall strategy.

International NGOs determine the policy and nature of the educational programmes, not the local NGOs. The considerably less powerful local NGOs do not appear to have benefited, until more recently, from capacity building and as a consequence are not well placed to argue the community school cause.

Standards and quality are used by both governments and NGOs to vindicate their position. It may not be helpful to have independent systems that have rigour and integrity to back up the claims of supremacy. However, without a quality assurance framework any educational approach is seriously weakened.

It is probably inevitable that the initial concern was with action and quantitative results but governments and NGOs now want to claim qualitative success. This could prove more difficult for NGOs because community schools have more outcomes to measure, less capacity in the local NGOs to deliver data and a government only interested in narrow measures.

ICECS needs to articulate a landscape that identifies all the different aspects of quality and make clear the links between different activities.

That landscape should set out to place QUALITY as the Holy Grail that all can buy into and all benefit from. Is it possible, that using international evidence, ICECS can set out a stall where evidence transcends NGOs motivated by belief or governments concerned with accountability?

The international NGOs and the donors who invest in local NGOs to build capacity may do so either because community schools or civil society is their concern. Therefore, the ICECS quality map should resonate with capacity builders and educationalists.

The international NGOs appear to be aware of the need to get a better accommodation with national governments. ICECS should set out how to secure the engagement of those governments in a drive for quality and value for money through international donors and deliverers.

The quality of teaching in community schools will continue to be a significant issue with all parties. The ICECS focus on sharing best practice may need to be part of a strategy that uses knowledge to empower teachers with as much emphasis on how practice is achieved (the skills) than what is being achieved (the knowledge).

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