

When communities take the place of the State

Dakar Senegal (Pana) –Indeed, the withdrawal of the state, which increasingly only supervises the educational system, leaves ample room for local initiatives.

Before it allowed initiatives develop in Burkina Faso, the central government selected communities combining several conditions aimed at optimizing their involvement, i.e. not having a school (the closest school is over 3 km away), having sufficient population density, having a management committee, a formal request from the village, and having a source of water.

Afterwards, between 1995 and 1999, with support from foreign partners, it founded 194 community schools with a total of 10,056 pupils, or 1% of the school population, of which 42% were girls (in 1995, girls only made up 39% of the primary school population).

In Burundi, the state encouraged communities to build schools, while in Côte d'Ivoire, experimental schools were located in poor, culturally heterogeneous communities.

In order to marshal community resources (in cash and in kind), a partnership developed between existing parent teacher associations, local structures of the Department of Education and volunteer committees founded for that purpose, to implement teaching programmes and manage school business on the whole.

In Madagascar, the "programme contract" approach linking the government, the school and the community (plus NGOs and partners in technical and financial aid) was founded based on pre-existing forms of cooperation and cultural standards ("Dina" or the social contract, a solemn commitment between two parties) and mutual obligations between members of the community.

The goal: to improve access to education through greater community involvement and empowerment in the managing of schools and school-related activities in view of giving back the schools to their communities. The results: on the national scale, between 1994 and 1997, enrolments in "Dina" schools rose by

Most African countries that have successfully adjusted their rate of enrolment have benefited from community participation in the promotion of Basic Education. The people's intervention in the school system is a result of the new political-institutional environment created by the state's new definition of its own role. It may range, to varying degrees, from the construction of school buildings to programme management, not to mention hiring of teachers.

44% as compared to 32% in other schools. Enrolments in "Dina" schools represented 16% of the school population in 1997-1998.

In Mali, international NGOs have been working directly with communities to help create a network of community associations for the promotion and management of schools.

Thus, rural and urban communities and associations have founded and continue to run schools. They are responsible for hiring and paying teachers, but also for recruiting pupils, and building, equipping and maintaining school buildings.

When they are recognized as being in the public interest, community schools

are given a grant from the municipal budget, and pedagogical monitoring and supervision are ensured by state services.

Due to this popular participation, between 1997 and 1998, 83,360 pupils already attended community schools. That represents 10% of the first cycle fundamental school population.

However, the percentage of girls is 40.6% in the first cycle of fundamental education as a whole, but only 38.3% in community schools.

The major problem in these communities is often the low levels of qualification of the teachers they hire. Other problems include, inadequate pedagogical supervision, problems

making roles clear and accepted by the different partners and the problem of sustainability.

In Chad, the movement was sparked by internal conflicts and government inadequacy in past years. During the period of civil war and political upheaval, there could be no educational activities unless they were taken charge of by communities themselves.

A case study shows that one of the common points in all these experiences, with the exception of Chad, is the difficulty of determining what falls within the scope of the communities and what falls within the scope of the government.

The recurring problem of role definition needs to be resolved in any partnership for it to make sustainable progress. Furthermore, in every case, the central government and/or political authorities initiated the process, provided the initial conceptual framework and continue to supply the schools with material resources. This is attested by examples in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal where the government ensures regular supervision and monitoring using qualified teachers and inspectors.

In Senegal, unlike the other two countries mentioned above, the teachers come from the communities, and are recruited by them with advice and assistance from Department of Education services.

The salaries of these teachers are paid by the communities, with assistance from international NGOs. Difficulties have arisen in both countries in terms of harmonizing the way "things are handled".

In Burkina Faso, frictions are linked to the frequency and schedule of school inspections. This is due to the fact that the inspectors have not sufficiently

integrated the innovations in their working programme.

In Côte d'Ivoire, communities feel that the Department of Education tends to restrict their freedom in terms of fund raising.

In Burundi, on the other hand, the financial burden has been divided up between the communities, local administration, NGOs and the government. Local administration bears 40% of construction costs, parents 20%, NGOs 20% and the remaining 20% is provided by the central government. The government has also established a double-session system and raised teachers' salaries accordingly.

In Madagascar, the government has set resources in place for teachers' salaries, equipment, construction, renovations, upkeep, teaching supplies and materials, supervision and maintenance services. In return, communities have participated in construction and renovations by donating local materials and labour.

They have also committed themselves to ensuring the upkeep of the buildings, improving the school environment, enrolling their children and sometimes hiring teachers. But when "disputes", arise, as in cases where commitments are not met, it is much easier for the government to sanction the communities than the opposite.



Bangladesh

Reaching Out to 'Hard-to-Reach' Children

DHAKA, Apr (IPS) - For 16 dollars a month Firoz Kabir, a university student, takes time off his classes to teach children who live in Jigatola, a slum that co-exists with the posh Dhanmondi residential area in the Bangladesh capital.

More than the money, Kabir finds great satisfaction spending two hours every morning at the Jigatola non-formal school with the 30-odd children of domestic help, street vendors and daily wage workers. The school, run by 'Development For The Poor', a non-government organisation (NGO), imparts basic education. Its impoverished pupils, most of them girls, are divided into two shifts a day and provided free books and educational material. Many of the pupils are themselves wage earners and work as domestics, shop helpers, hotel boys and mechanics to supplement meagre family incomes.

These working children are what experts call "hard-to-reach" in the Education for All (EFA) drive.

Before the Jigatola non-formal school came up children in the slum did not attend school, and according to Khodeja Akhter, a teacher, success of any EFA project here depends on allowing the children flexibility to "learn as well as earn."

In Dhaka city, as many as 2,025 non-formal schools are now imparting basic education to about 60,750 slum children, 54 percent of whom are girls, says Kazi Farid Ahmed, director of the Directorate of Non-Formal Education.

Funded by the UN children's agency, UNICEF, and supported by the governments of Bangladesh and Sweden, the Basic Education for Hard-To-Reach Urban Children's project (BEHTRUC) aims at providing non-formal basic education (NFE) to 350,000 children. In six divisional headquarters between 1997 and 2002. Already, under BEHTRUC, 180,000 children in Bangladesh's six divisional headquarters of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet are receiving a basic education. The next 16 months are expected to see several thousand more (NFE) schools established for urban non-literate children in the 8-14 age group as the biggest initiative of its kind.

Some 125 NGOs have been entrusted the responsibility of operating these NFE schools for slum children who are a source of income for their impoverished families and in fact form 56 percent of the total slum population. In some families, child labour makes up one third of the family's income. Not only do these working children have little time to go to school, but in most slum areas, there are no schools to attend.

And even if there were schools, the children still cannot afford the extra-costs associated with education and so they are considered the most hard-to-reach, a UNICEF study says.

As part of the project, teachers from participating NGOs receive special training in participatory, child-centered teaching methods and in the specific needs and concerns of hard-to-reach children. Project teachers are required to make home visits to all their students to closely monitor progress and to keep their families informed. Aided by the Asian Development Bank (ASDB), the International Development Agency (IDA), the Swiss International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian aid agency, four NFE projects worth 309 million dollars are now underway in Bangladesh. Education Minister A. Sadique told Bangladesh Parliament last month that as a result of sustained efforts, the literacy rate has now reached 60 percent from 34.6 percent in 1991 and that he expected it to rise further to 80 percent by 2001. But many experts think the government needed to formulate a more realistic policy to address the problem of drop-outs and never-enrolled children at the primary level.

The majority of the country's roughly 120 million people live in its villages. Currently there is a 38 percent drop-out rate and imparting education to five million drop-outs and children who have never been enrolled in schools poses a formidable challenge to the government.

Also there is as yet no comprehensive plan for the education of over six million child workers in the 9-15 age group.

Ansar Ali Khan, UNESCO or the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's representative in Bangladesh advocates a more vigorous drive to remove illiteracy from the country by 2006.

"For this the government will have to invest more funds in the education sector and make all-out efforts for the spread and sustenance of education," Khan said.

Currently, Bangladesh spends 2.3 percent of its GNP on education which is far less than what other countries in the region spend, according to the Education Watch Report, 1999.

The report pointed out that allocation for primary education is also very little and that 90 percent of the allocations are swallowed by salaries and allowances for teaching staff and administrators.

Right to Education

What Priorities ?

(The third part of a series by Katrien Beekman, Associate Expert, UNESCO-Dakar. The views expressed in this article are those of its author and do not necessarily reflect those of the organization).

It is not enough to have the necessary resources and technical capacities to achieve education for all at the national level. Realising the right to education demands political will, social commitment and genuine international cooperation.

Protecting the Right to Education is an Attitude Above All.

Education is a right. However, education for all is far from being achieved. While low literacy and high dropout rates prove that developing countries are far off the mark, it is equally premature to applaud industrialised countries with universal education. For, they are experiencing problems with functional illiteracy and new disparities, such as those affecting indigenous or immigrant children. So the attainment of the right to education still remains a challenge.

Indeed, the attainment of the right to education goes beyond high scores on education indicators, it is an ongoing process. Neither economic prosperity, nor sustainable development will spell its end. The "human rights attitude" means that the ultimate purpose of education will always be the self fulfilment of individuals and respect for their dignity. Attaining the right to education involves social commitment. A society that makes constant efforts to give the most vulnerable the same opportunity to learn and succeed in life as the "elite" and to eradicate de facto inequalities can say it is on the road to protecting the right to education. Furthermore, the content of education should also reflect the human rights philosophy. Education should spread the message of human rights and promote a democratic, pluralistic and tolerant society.

But, the "human rights attitude" also leads us to act at a higher level, because the attainment of the right to education cannot be restricted to internal levels. The conventions point this out and makes it the responsibility of international solidarity to defend the cause of social justice on the global scale. We must close the growing divide between the North, where kindergarten classes already play with Internet, and the South, which often does not even have enough resources to provide each child with a textbook.

Making Strong and Clear Commitments

It is high time the international community, in all its components, translated political speeches into clear commitments. These should be tied to time-bound deadlines measurable through achievement and implementation indicators. To this end, it is vital for partners in education to consult with the Committees in charge of Supervising Human Rights Conventions in order to define new priorities and adopt a system of common indicators, capable of reflecting the fundamental pillars of the right to education, such as human dignity, non-discrimination, children's participation in matters concerning them, etc. Finally, henceforth, failure to comply with commitments should no longer go unnoticed but be accompanied by pressure from the international community. Only then will we be able to meet the fundamental education needs of every citizen of the world.