The Gambia

National consultation in preparation for the Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Conference on the Post-2015 Education Agenda

REPORT

December 9, 2014
I. Introduction

In preparing for the World Education Forum 2015, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in collaboration with the Gambia National Commission for UNESCO organized a National forum in order to consult widely with the education stakeholder community in the Gambia on the proposed targets for the Post-2015 Education Agenda. The consultation was also centered on the implementation modalities and the national benchmarks relative to each of the targets.

II. Proposed targets on the post-2015 education agenda in the perspective of national challenges and priorities in education: views and opinion of national stakeholders

The meeting discussed and agreed to endorse the overarching goal and targets that emanated from the Muscat meeting of Ministers of Education. Notwithstanding the following opinions were expressed on all the proposed targets:

Target 1: By 2030, at least x% of girls and boys are ready for primary school through participation in quality early childhood care and education, including at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.

Views and Opinions: The national concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is based on the age bracket of 0 to 6 years anchored in 3 main strategies: the baby friendly community initiative (BFCl), the annexation of ECCE centers in existing lower basic schools in deprived communities and ECCE centers run by the private sector.

Challenges:

1. Availability of qualified facilitators
2. Availability of teaching and learning resources
3. Holistic and integrated ECCE continue to pose difficulties to service delivery
4. Coordination of the sectors to deliver on their individual mandates through the platform of integrated ECCE

Target 2: By 2030, all girls and boys complete free and compulsory quality basic education of at least 9 years and achieve relevant learning outcomes, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.

Views and Opinions: The concept of basic education in the Gambia is the combination of lower and upper basic with nine years of uninterrupted education with a terminal examination at the end of the 9th year. This examination determines the transition of the grade 9 graduate to upper-secondary while keeping in focus that the proportion of the graduates that could not transit be absorbed in the post-basic technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. In the Gambia there is constitutional provision for free and compulsory basic education but no enforcement due to the fact that demand for diversified forms of education continues to outweigh the current levels of supply.

Challenges:

However, the challenges in universalizing free and compulsory basic education in the Gambia are associated mainly with the following:

1. Cultural and traditional beliefs
2. Completion rates for female students in basic education
3. Teacher training and availability of teaching and learning materials
4. Financing
5. Teacher competency and professional development
6. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education and the use of education in ICT
7. Promotion of indigenous languages as media to improve teaching and learning

**Target 3:** By 2030, all youth and at least x% of adults reach a proficiency level in literacy and numeracy sufficient to fully participate in society, with particular attention to girls and women and the most marginalized.

**Views and Opinions:** The main strategy in the delivery of integrated and functional literacy programmes to the youth and adults is mainly informed by the public-private partnership approach which allows for the use of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) with comparative advantage in adult and non-formal education to provide the service. A contractual agreement is reached between these providers and the Ministry of Education through a framework that is clear in terms of the provision of resources to the providers and the deliverables by the providers.

**Challenges:**
There are challenges in increasing the current level of literacy rate from 54% to 70% and these are as follows:

1. Capacity of the providers
2. Insufficient number of the providers
3. Inadequate financing
4. Weak coordination

**Target 4:** By 2030, at least x% of youth and y% of adults have the knowledge and skills for decent work and life through technical and vocational, upper secondary and tertiary education and training, with particular attention to gender equality and the most marginalized.

**Views and Opinions:** Beyond 9 years of uninterrupted basic education, opportunities are created through a variety of paths within the framework of life-long learning. The following provide such opportunities

- Post basic Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) targeting basic education graduates
- Secondary TVET targeting basic education graduates
- Post-secondary TVET targeting upper secondary graduates
- Tertiary and Higher education targeting upper secondary graduates

**Challenges:**

1. Linking TVET to the job market
2. Poor perception of society
3. Low rate of completion
4. Inadequate capacity in the delivery of TVET programmes
5. Diversification of TVET programmes
6. Lack of gender perspective in Post-Secondary TVET institutions
7. Certification and accreditation
8. Credit transfers within and across tertiary and higher education programmes
9. Lack of research findings to inform policy makers
Target 5: By 2030, all learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to establish sustainable and peaceful societies, including through global citizenship education and education for sustainable development.

Views and Opinions: It is noted that the current curricula for all levels of education in the Gambia do not cater, in a comprehensive manner, education for sustainable development. However, attempts have been made to develop and deliver a national curriculum for life-skills and livelihood skills in a bid to inculcate psycho-social skills through the former and income generating skills from the latter. It is therefore envisaged that with a thorough review and revision of the existing life-skill curriculum and the possible inclusion of learning areas that will be able to provide skills, values and attitudes in support of peaceful societies and global citizenship education, the outcome of such intervention will in no small measure contribute to education for sustainable development.

Challenges: However, the challenges that lie ahead are as follows:

1. Insufficient curricula that address learning areas in support of education for sustainable development
2. Teacher training that is oriented towards education for sustainable development
3. Inter-sectoral coordination and implementation of education for sustainable development
4. The capacity of practitioners to deliver curricula in support for education for sustainable development

Target 6: By 2030, all governments ensure that all learners are taught by qualified, professionally-trained, motivated and well-supported teachers.

Views and Opinions: In the Gambia, there has been a major paradigm shift in teacher training at the level of the Primary Teachers Certificate. This is a complete departure from college-based teacher training to non-college based with the latter supporting the teacher trainees to apply the skills learnt from face-to-face sessions during school vacation training (Christmas, Easter and Summer). In terms of teacher deployment, the education sector has made meaningful advances in posting teachers to serve in deprived communities through the introduction of teacher incentive packages such as the hardship allowances and the construction of staff quarters. In line with the Government’s desire to motivate and retain teachers, the Public Service Commission responsible for the entire civil service has recently delegated key human resource management functions (appointments, confirmations and promotions) to deal with a certain category of teachers in the public sector. This therefore empowers the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to motivate and support the category of teachers that falls within its current jurisdiction.

In spite of all these developments, the sector continues to be challenged by the following

Challenges:

1. Low content knowledge of qualified teachers
2. Retraining of teachers within the context of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
3. Insufficient support mechanisms to mentor and support teacher-trainees (school-based)
4. A weak career structure for teachers based on the credentials they are recruited with. Hence lifelong learning opportunities are usually not taken advantage of.
5. Insufficient pedagogical skills to place the teacher in an advantaged and confident position
6. Gender disparity in teacher numbers at all levels of the education system
7. Low perception of teaching as a profession by society
**Target 7:** By 2030, all countries allocate at least 4-6% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or at least 15-20% of their public expenditure to education, prioritizing groups most in need; and strengthen financial cooperation for education, prioritizing countries most in need.

**Views and Opinions:** Over the years, the education sector has benefitted from a steady increase of level of domestic financing from 14.6% in 2005 to 21% in 2014. Conversely, external financing continues to decline mainly as a result of a drop in the number external donor partners, causing the education sector to be donor orphaned. Clearly the fundamental challenge in the entire education sector is that the available domestic and donor financing cannot deliver the objectives in the education sector strategic plan and by extension meet the education for all target by 2015.

In keeping with our national objective to universalize 9 years of uninterrupted basic education and increase the participation rate at upper secondary, tertiary and higher education with the inclusion of TVET programmes the current level of domestic financing must increase from 4.3% of GDP to 5% by 2030 with a substantial increase of the current level of support from external and in-country donor. In addition to the above, the following challenges need to be addressed.

**Challenges:**

1. Low presence of donors
2. Sustaining domestic financing
3. Consolidating and sustaining the gains registered in the education sector

**III. Operationalization of the education agenda at national level**

**a. Suggested national benchmarks per target**

The following national benchmarks have been agreed upon by the national conference and these are as follows:

**Proposed Target 1** - 60% of children age between 0 and 6 years are able to access ECCE with special attention to gender equality and disadvantaged population

**Proposed Target 2** - 100% of children of school-going age have access to 9 years of uninterrupted basic education; and 97% of this group complete 9 years of basic education cycle with special attention to disadvantage groups and gender

**Proposed Target 3** – 70% of youths and adults reach proficiency level in literacy and numeracy with particular attention to women and girls and deprived areas

**Proposed Target 4** – with focus on gender and marginalized groups

- 20% receive post-basic TVET
- 48% receive post-secondary TVET
- 30% receive tertiary education and training
- 30% of the youth attend higher education (university)

**Proposed Target 5** - All learners acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes and values to establish a sustainable and peaceful society in the Gambia
Proposed Target 6 – 100% of the teachers are qualified, professionally trained and motivated and supported

Proposed Target 7 – 20% of public expenditure or 5% of GDP is allocated to the education sector with priority given to marginalised groups in terms of needs

b. Suggestions of implementation requirements to facilitate implementation of the future education agenda at national level (in terms of policy and planning, governance, coordination and partnerships, financing, and monitoring and accountability)

In order to pursue the proposed targets, the conference agreed on the following implementation requirements:

1. The involvement of stakeholders, i.e., NGOs, CSOs, bilateral partners, local education groups, in-country partners and inter-governmental organizations in education service delivery must be rigorously pursued.
2. The Joint Donor Review and Supervision Missions continue to play an observatory role in advancing the agenda of Education for All.
3. The decentralization of capacities, documentation of best practices, ICT infrastructural development and the attraction and retention of competent staff will be continually encouraged.
4. Community capacity building opportunities will be created to help galvanize meaningful community participation in education service delivery.
5. In order to adequately finance education and justifiably distribute the resources acquired, public-private partnership and sound advocacy strategies will be pursued. Positive discrimination of marginalized groups will also be advocated.
6. In order for effective monitoring and accountability to take place, the decentralized structures will be strengthened to maximize their participation in data collection and management to enhance decision making at all levels. The monitoring and evaluation framework will be reviewed to improve on the processes of monitoring and evaluation.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, the consultative meeting, taking into account the views and opinions as they relate to national characteristics on the proposed targets, the progress registered thus far in the attainment of the EFA targets and the challenges that lie ahead in the country’s drive to achieve the EFA goals, agreed on the following recommendations

1. Diversification of educational provision in order to create opportunities that are not limited to schooling only
2. Inter-sectorial coordination to support the implementation of an integrated ECCE programme
3. Capacity strengthening of adult and non-formal education providers
4. Resource mobilization (both domestic and external)
5. Intensification of teacher training (both pre-service and in-service)
6. Curricula review and revision in support of education for sustainable development
7. Popularizing technical and vocational education and training
8. Scholarship and loan schemes to enhance participation in tertiary and higher education programmes
9. Intensify research
Annexes

List of participants

1. UNESCO NATCOM (4 participants)
2. Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
3. Ministry of Youth and Sports
4. Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
5. Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment
6. Deputy Permanent Secretary Programmes (MoBSE)
7. Deputy Permanent Secretary Administration (MoBSE)
8. Deputy Permanent Secretary Programmes (MoHERST)
9. Deputy Project Manager (PCU – MoBSE)
10. The Vice Chancellor – University of The Gambia
11. Director of Loans – Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
12. The Coordinator – Central Project Aids Coordination Unit
13. Directorate of Planning – MoBSE
14. Directorate of Basic Education – MoBSE
15. Directorate of Standards and Quality Assurance - MoBSE
16. Directorate of Science and Technology Education – MoBSE
17. Directorate of Curriculum Research Evaluation and Development – MoBSE
18. Directorate of Human Resource and Development – MoBSE
19. Regional Director 1
20. Regional Director 2
21. Regional Director 3
22. Regional Director 4
23. Regional Director 5
24. Regional Director 6
25. Deputy Coordinator – PCU
26. Education Adviser – Action Aid The Gambia
27. Head of School of Education – Gambia College
28. Director of Research – MoHERST
29. Director STI – MoHERST
30. Director of Tertiary and Higher education – MoHERST
31. Education Specialist – UNICEF
32. Resident Representative – UNDP
33. National Programme Officer – WFP
34. Coordinator – EFANet
35. General Secretary – Gambia Teachers Union