

Building Capacity in the Education Sector in Africa: The Need to Strengthen External Agencies' Capacity to help.

Seminar on:

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Overview

1. Resumption of strong education growth since 2000. If maintained, major progress towards EFA in 2015 possible.
2. Two major challenges to make this progress sustainable:
 - **Shift in focus from access to quality and equity;**
 - **More effective resource use so that EFA can be reached in a sustainable way that permits growth of post-primary education and limits aid dependency in education sector.**
3. To succeed, countries need to develop stronger capacity to deal with both the “political economy” of reforms *and* technical constraints on implementation;
4. External agencies can help by:
 - **Building their own capacity to provide technical support;**
 - **Revising their modalities for providing support;**
 - **Developing a special program for “EFA hard core countries”.**

1. Resumption of sustainable education growth?

- 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report shows majority of SSA countries seriously “off track” to reach EFA by 2015. SSA cannot attain the level of economic growth needed to reduce poverty and reach other MDGs without improving its human capital base.
- But available EFA studies do not yet capture impact of positive developments during last decade to address factors causing the stagnation in the 1980s and early 1990s.
- Education data for recent years show marked education turnaround in SSA. Gross Enrollment Ratio increased from 78% in 1998/99 to 84% in 2000/01 and 91% in 2002/03, reflecting broad-based growth in access at a level not seen since the 1970s.
- Increased external aid helps strengthen this turnaround: e.g., debt relieve, FTI, increased focus on Africa’s development issues. But to be effective, aid needs to focus more on addressing capacity issues.

2. But many challenges to making progress sustainable.

(a) Shift in focus from access to quality and equity

1. More than 90% of SSA children enter school, 2/3 reach final grade and half of these master expected basic skills. ***Thus, overarching challenge of reaching EFA has shifted from general increase in admission to:***

- Enrolling last 10 -15%, largely poor rural children, in majority girls, and the rapidly increasing number of HIV/AIDS orphans (in 2010, 1 in 10);
- Reducing dropout, and
- Improving learning outcomes.

2. Development and implementation of needed policies and programs require strong national capacity.

2. Challenges to making progress sustainable (cont)

(b) More effective resource use.

Making progress sustainable requires enhanced effectiveness in use of all resources (national and external aid) in order to:

1. Respond to demand for post-primary education in a way that maintains budget priority for good quality EFA;
2. Limit increase in aid dependency in education sector:
 - **Aid now average 25-30% of primary education budgets in low-income SSA countries (50% in some cases). Projections of aid needed to reach EFA in 2015 range from 1/2 to 2/3 of budget that year. At that level, aid needed long beyond 2015 to maintain EFA.**
 - **Donor and partner countries need to review long-term implications of high aid dependence in terms of both impact on education sector in Africa and need for long-term predictability of aid.**
3. To address issues of the above type requires stronger capacity.

3. Two priority areas for capacity strengthening

(a) Policy-making capacity: “Political economy” of reforms

Making policy choices needed to respond to these challenges is politically difficult in slow-growing, low-income countries because:

1. These rural economies do not generate the tax revenues needed to both reach EFA and provide free secondary ed. for all primary school graduates, nor the modern sector jobs the graduates seek;
2. To successfully join the knowledge-based global economy, SSA must urgently reform its higher education system;
3. Those now excluded from EFA have much less political voice than those seeking entry to secondary and higher education;
4. To succeed, reforms need support from teachers. Difficult to obtain in context of long-term decline in salaries, due largely to decline in GDP per capita (1/3 on average in SSA since 1970). Budget key constraint on teacher salaries and new recruitment.

3. Two priority areas for capacity strengthening (cont.) (b) Technical capacity

1. Crucial areas for strengthening technical capacity:
 - Preparation of policies and programs for decision makers;
 - Translation of policy objectives into concrete actions;
 - Development of ownership to policies among key stakeholders;
 - Implementation of well-prepared programs;
 - Monitoring and evaluation/action-based research;
 - In context of budget support, ministry of education must develop stronger systems to negotiate with ministry of finance.

2. Main problem often not lack of capacity but difficulty to mobilize, strengthen, motivate, and retain existing national capacity under current budget and institutional constraints.

3. External Agencies can help by:

(a) Building their own capacity to provide technical support

In African context, both technical and financial aid important. Agencies provide technical support in two ways:

1. Directly by own staff or consultants financed by them. Financial aid for education in Africa **increasing**. Capacity to provide high-quality technical support by agency staff **decreasing** because:
 - ***Insufficient political attention*** in donor countries to need to maintain strong technical competence in both bilateral and multilateral agencies to ensure high-quality aid;
 - Trend towards ***delivering education aid as budget*** support often driven by desire to limit cost of aid delivery by cutting agencies' technical capacity. Benefits of budget support (using national systems) may be lost in lower technical quality of education aid.
2. Indirectly through funding of sector programs. As currently applied, financing capacity-building through budget support often difficult since this may not be priority in national budget process.

4. External Agencies can help by:
(b) Revising their modalities for providing support

1. Focus on helping mobilize, develop, utilize, reward and retain existing national and regional capacity (including through regional cooperation) rather than creating new capacity through long-term TA, external training and equipment, often not effective;
2. Support integrated, three-prong approaches: (i) Build knowledge base; (ii) knowledge exchange to benefit from international good practices; and (iii) grant financed technical support to national teams (e.g., ADEA's quality nodes, Pôle de Dakar, NETF);
3. Better coordination among agencies to make aid more demand driven, better managed, and of higher quality;
4. Help countries address factors causing "brain drain": e.g., low salaries, poor working conditions, and institutional constraints (e.g., more use of merit-based appointment and promotion practices; less turnover of technical staff when ministers change; more use by policy makers of technical advice).

4. External agencies can help by (cont.):
(c) Special program for “hard core EFA countries”.

“Hard core EFA Countries” => Far from EFA, low per capita income, experienced civil strife, weak institutional capacity.

1. FTI partners should consider establishing special technical team to support “hard core” countries through three-prong grant financed capacity-building program (analytical work, knowledge exchange and technical support to national teams);
2. Team’s services would be integral part of overall FTI support and closely linked to facilitating implementation of sector programs;
3. Initially, team comprise 3-5 high-level specialists in 5-7 areas where implementation constraints particularly severe. Initially for five years. Continuation subject to performance;
4. Benefits: Strong public good function. Using 1% of total education aid on this would increase impact of overall education aid;
5. Possible location: UNESCO Hq/IIEP/BREDA, or several “Pôle de Dakar” in African institutions.

Conclusions

1. For increased external financing for education in Africa to be effective, this aid must be associated with new approaches to help countries strengthen their capacity in the education sector;
2. Priority to effective utilization of existing capacity;
3. Donor countries need to give more attention to:
 - **That providing aid through budget support does not lead to reduced technical competence of bilateral agencies;**
 - **Achieving better balance between support for, respectively, country-specific and regional programs/institutions.**
4. Reaching EFA by 2015 and limiting donor dependency in ed. sector hinges on success in building sector's capacity.