

EFA by 2015

A tantalising prospect for Tanzania¹



Introduction

The Education for All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a global policy framework for governments, international organisations, the private sector and civil society to reduce poverty and social and gender inequality. Of the eight MDGs, only two focus directly on education, and yet these goals are at the centre of development, as sustainable development cannot take place without education (Carmen, 1996). It is for this reason that EFA goals are critical to the successful implementation of the other six MDGs.

Quality education

Learners cannot achieve the competencies embodied in the curriculum when ingredients of quality education are non-existent or compromised. Therefore, education ought to aim at producing learning outcomes reflected in learner capabilities (Jansen and Christie, 1999; HakiElimu, 2008). Guttman (2005, p.2) observes that, except for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Dakar Framework for Action, most UN declarations ‘...are silent about the quality of education to be provided’. There is no universal agreement on the meaning of quality in education. However, a review of research evidence points to the following dimensions or components:

- i. Investment in teachers to obtain an adequate, well-motivated and valued workforce of quality;
- ii. Use of teaching methods that are more interactive and child centred;
- iii. Increased focus on developing learners’ capabilities to enable them to thrive in a fast-changing globalised world;
- iv. Guarantee that students spend enough time learning; a broadly agreed benchmark of 850 to 1,000 hours of instruction per year is not reached in many countries;
- v. Respect for gender equality and diversity;
- vi. Understanding that literacy is a critical tool for the mastery of all other subjects and the best predictor of long-term learning achievement;
- vii. Recognition that the choice of language of instruction is of critical importance;
- viii. Improved quality of learning materials that strongly affect what teachers can do;

- ix. Implementation of early childhood care and education programmes to help with subsequent achievement in school.

Thus, as we assess progress made in the implementation of EFA goals, there is a need to critically examine the extent to which issues of quality of and equity in education are being addressed.

Education status in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan African countries lag behind any other developing or income-poor region in the world in terms of the net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education. On average, 30 per cent of the children are still out of school. The average enrolment ratio in all developing regions is 88 per cent, which is staggeringly high compared to the low enrolment ratio in some African countries. However, even those with a higher NER do not have completion rates higher than 80 per cent. If that trend persists, EFA is unlikely to be achieved by 2015. Some countries have reached gender parity at primary level. However, the gap widens the higher one goes in the education system.

Education in Tanzania

In Tanzania, significant achievements were recorded during Phase I of the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP I, 2002–2006) and during the Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP, 2004–2009), especially in enrolment expansion. However, despite these impressive achievements, many challenges and gaps exist. Wide regional variation in enrolment rates continues (e.g., 100 per cent NER in Kilimanjaro; 80.2 per cent NER in Tabora); rates of repetition (5.9 per cent), dropout (3.4 per cent) and non-completion (20.2 per cent) are relatively high; children with disabilities continue to be seriously underserved; and street children’s access to education remains very low. A 2008 census of street children in Mwanza, a region around Lake Victoria, indicated that 26 per cent of participants had never attended school, and a further 45 per cent had dropped out of school altogether (Carabain, 2008). Generally, among enrolled pupils, almost 30 per cent of pupils do not pass their primary examinations in Standard (Grade) 7, which hinders the transition to secondary schools. There is also a 14 per cent gender gap in pass rates.

Despite the primary education NER of 97.3 per cent achieved in 2007 (URT, 2008), the above data on access and equity do not give a positive prognosis for achieving EFA and relevant MDG targets by 2015. There is also great concern among all education stakeholders, including government, over the quality aspect of

education being provided. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) has drawn up a number of strategies, along Guttman's listing of quality ingredients, to improve quality in education (URT, 2008).

The Tanzania Education Network/*Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania* (TEN/MET) and other like-minded civil society organisations (CSOs) are calling upon the government to put greater emphasis on developing learning outcomes or capabilities among learners than the hitherto focus on inputs or infrastructure (TEN/MET, 2006, 2008). Indeed, a movement is developing in East Africa, under the UWEZO East Africa Initiative, that focuses on assessment of learning outcomes in order to determine the extent to which our education is of quality (in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes). An assessment of a learning outcomes pilot exercise, based on the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in India, was carried out in two districts in Tanzania in April 2008. Though at the time of writing this paper the report had not yet been published, what is known is that there were children, 13–16 year-olds, who were unable to read sentences and stories and do simple arithmetic aimed at 7–8-year-olds (Standard or Grade 2 level)! When finally published, the findings of the report are expected to be both revealing and disturbing.

Conclusion

All MDGs and most EFA goals are quantitatively focused but there is a need to think of combining quantity with quality. There is no point in having lots of schooling and no learning. Children in Africa, particularly Tanzanians, need to finish school with skills. As such, the examination systems need to be completely revamped to measure children's skills. Tanzania's Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) do not measure skills: quality of education, defined in terms of learning outcomes and capabilities of pupils, can no longer be ignored and needs to be at the centre of our education reforms.

Equitable access to educational opportunity is essential in a rights-respecting democracy. All African countries, including Tanzania, have developed strategies to improve enrolment and completion rates. In Tanzania, while both PEDP and SEDP have dramatically increased enrolments, many children are still left out from accessing a full education. Equity is needed in both enrolments and other qualitative aspects of equity, including inclusive, gendered experiences in the classroom; learning materials and equipment for pupils with disabilities; teachers taking responsibility for all learners in a school or educational programme; and the transfer of financial resources to local levels.

However, the most important single intervention to improve access, equity and quality is increased funding at international and national level. In Tanzania, the capitation grant to schools should be:

- a) increased to US\$16 for primary schools and US\$30 for secondary schools;
- b) known and available to all; and
- c) delivered in two to four regular instalments a year.

These three issues are critical in education development in African countries and other income-poor countries of the world. CSOs are appealing to the world community and national governments, and for TEN/MET in the United Republic of Tanzania, to rekindle their commitment made in 2000 at the Dakar Education for All Forum and the MDG Summit to raise funds to ensure that EFA and MDGs are achieved by 2015. Africa has to virtually 'run' to achieve the goals by the set date, so what is needed at international and national levels is focused and committed leadership to move forward on these goals.

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Endnote

- 1 This is a revised and abridged version of the paper 'Towards reaching education millennium development and EFA goals in Tanzania and beyond' prepared for presentation to the President of the United Republic of Tanzania prior to the UN Summit on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2008.

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