

[Questions and Answers with Keynote Speakers]

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Professor, Center for the study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE), Hiroshima University)

Thank you Professor Kaneko for your interesting video and presentation. At this time we will take questions to the speakers, who we again invite to the stage.

Question 1: Aki Yonehara (Research Fellow, JSPS)

My question is for Professor Diarra, who spoke about education evaluation. When it comes to evaluation, I believe that it has more to do with the number of persons who participate in the seminars and the physical aspect of who is involved in education. That being said, however, I don't think that the quality of and satisfaction level with education, which we are promoting, can be quantitatively evaluated. Therefore under such circumstances, I think that it is still insufficient to evaluate education at this time. In the case of Mali, the Professor had shown an index used to evaluate education, so I would like to have his advice on how we would be able to do that.

Question 2: Vyda Yakobe (Teacher, Ministry of Education, Malawi)

First of all, thank you, Professor Diarra, for a wonderful presentation. I also commend the Government of Mali for putting in various strategies to improve the quality of education. You mentioned about the transfer of resources. What measures is the Government of Mali putting into place to ensure equity in the distribution of resources?

Question 3: Bihina Philomine (Ministry of Basic Education, Cameroon)

This is a double-barreled question posed to Professor Diarra. First of all I have some worries: I wonder if the 'community approach' is not the state essentially giving up its responsibility to provide basic education for all children. Second, given the demands for quality that we can make at the community level of project management, how did you identify and determine the quality of human resources needed for the community approach?

Abou Diarra (Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, Mali)

Thank you for the questions. First of all, in answer to the last question, I don't think that the state is giving up its responsibility by asking the community to take charge. True, the state has a duty to offer quality education to all the children of the country, but for a long time we felt that the state could do all of this alone. However, even though it is the duty of the state to do this, our experience shows that the state simply does not have the means to do everything regarding education by itself; the task must be shared. So it is important not to ask the state alone to take care of teaching and education. The state and the beneficiaries of education, the people, must work hand in hand and this is what the community school aims to be.

The communities ask the state for structures that would suit the children. Well in our countries the reality is that the states do not always have the means and the communities are not going to sit on their hands, waiting until the state can give them the resources. This is why in Mali we decided that the communities that wish to and can afford to create schools have the right to do so. I showed that some things such as teachers' salaries must remain with the state; but the communities can take care of the maintenance of schools, as this can usually be done with local materials. Yes, the state has the responsibility, but cannot do it alone; hence the need to share.

In reaching the conclusion that the community school was the best option, we first tried to sensitize the population

so they could understand what the schools could bring to them and understand what we wanted to do through this community approach. Then we had the school management committees put in place. We explained to everybody the different roles and responsibilities, after which we wrote the action plans and looked for resources. Finally, we came up with a follow-up mechanism in order to see whether these committees were working or not.

The second question was asked about the transfer of funds from the state to the communities. We understood that centralized management of resources had a limiting effect in that the state was not in a position to appreciate the needs of the users. The users know their needs much better, which is why whatever the limited means the state has, these resources must be put into the hands of the beneficiaries so that they can use them in the most efficient way. This is why we decentralized, so that competencies and money could be handed over to the communities.

We apply a financial law to the distribution of resources. We have the specific criteria based on the size of the structure, for example, a school with a small number of children will receive less and a large school will receive more, taking into account the number of people working there. There are additional criteria on which we base the sharing of resources between all the different projects.

Now I'm not sure that I understood the first question. Was it about the evaluation of the quality of education? Could the person who asked that question be more specific? Are we talking about evaluating schools and the participation of the communities in the development of schools or are we talking about the evaluation of the quality of the teaching in general?

Aki Yonehara (Research Fellow, JSPS)

My interest is in actually in both areas, but my question was about the policy-making for example, with the participation of schools; how you value the satisfaction level as well as the quality. I would also like to hear from you about [evaluating] the teaching in school from those perspectives.

Abou Diarra (Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, Mali)

Thank you for that clarification. Regarding the transfer of resources to the local communities; today local communities can exert their authority regarding maintenance and building of schools. We have, for the first time, assessed the work done by the local communities and the quality of services for constructing schools is not satisfactory because the procedures that have to be followed in order to implement these works are not being followed. So we believe that the community has to be supported from the technical and administrative perspectives. We have to follow up to see how classes are being built. So this is just a start and local communities have started to take it upon themselves to provide these services. However, they still need to be supported so that the quality becomes as good as or better than what it used to be when the state was responsible for doing everything.

In terms of the evaluation of education in general, we have the traditional service to make assessments in terms of educational quality, but it's not only about the teaching, but also the school environment in its entirety that needs to be assessed in order to allow children to be educated under the best circumstances. We have the inspectors, but in my country the reality is different to that of Japan. There are logistical issues in that the inspectors need to go into the field on a regular basis to assess and support teachers. So we are trying to make the areas smaller so that inspectors can provide reinforced support to the teachers.

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Professor, Center for the study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE), Hiroshima University)

Thank you very much. So we have had the question about if and how well education has improved as a result of community participation. Second we had the issue of resources transfer and how it is affected by distribution criteria and decentralization to the community. I think Professor Kaneko, that the question about the community level issues was also posed based on your part of the presentation. Therefore, if possible, I would appreciate your comments on this.

Ikuyo Kaneko (Professor, Graduate School of Media and Governance, and Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University)

As I said, on the surface the community schools in Mali and Japan appear similar in the idea or the basic philosophy, but I think in reality, they are quite different. With community schools in Japan, there is only a tiny transfer of authority. There is no transfer of money or any basic material. However, I think that in countries such as Mali, facilities and resources need to be transferred at the same time as the authority. In Japan, as I said the governance of education has traditionally been very hierarchical and it was very successful in the past, but there is a big hole open, which may show some direction for the future. We do have to consider that we share philosophy, but the methods have to be different in other countries. Thank you

Question 4: Lahoucine Rahmouni (Counselor, Moroccan Embassy)

First of all I'd like to thank the hosts of this forum. This is very important, I believe, because education plays a very important role in our societies and notably in the societies of developing countries. I would like to thank the Japanese government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for the support that they have provided to the developing countries and especially our region in Africa. I would also like to thank Professor Diarra for a very clear presentation and I would like to commend you for this pilot experience, which may encourage other countries to follow in your footsteps. It is in that perspective that I would like to pose my question. Do you have any similar programmes or ideas with regard to pre-school education? I believe that if community collaboration starts at an early stage, people will understand it easier and the children will grow up through primary school being used to it, which I think is very positive. Once again, thanks very much.

Question 5: Yuriko Kameyama (Save the Children Fund)

Thank you for this opportunity to ask a question. I represent Save the Children and I very much appreciate your invaluable presentations. My question is to Professor Kaneko, about the quality of community school. What have been the effects on these students in terms of descriptive and comprehension ability; areas in which Japanese students tend to rank lower? With the introduction of community schools, have there been any positive effects in these areas?

Ikuyo Kaneko (Professor, Graduate School of Media and Governance, and Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University)

First of all I would like to say that in Mali they have been doing a tremendous job in changing the situation there and I commend their government for that. I have much less to commend the Japanese government for in this regard (Laughs). I think the power of the people is doing that and the government has created a framework that makes these things possible.

There are two major problems in public school education in Japan. One is the so-called "first grade problem" in which new pupils face adjustment trouble when they transfer from kindergarten to 1st grade. The other is the

seventh grade problem caused by transition from elementary to junior high school. Elementary school education is more intimate; person to person, and as soon as one gets to junior high there tends to be more formulae and rote memorization, the result of which is that many students tend to fall behind, especially in Math and Science. It is the so-called “seventh grade problem”.

Going back to the pre-school, we have a large number of private kindergartens. Those who can afford to pay for these kindergartens are very limited. In families where both parents work, as well as single-parent families, children tend to go to the public nursery schools, and there is a long wait for children to get into these schools for which there is a greater demand due to their lower fees because these nursery schools are subsidized by taxes. There are supposedly one million children waiting to get in. At the same time, with the decline of Japan’s economic situation, there are many more families in which both parents have to work. Many children cannot go to public nursery schools even if it is their hope, while at the same time, many children spend a long time apart from their parents. There is a great need for the Japanese society and government to cope with this situation, which is yet to happen.

To the second question, the community schools on a whole started recently, and as such there hasn’t been sweeping conclusive social change. Nevertheless, one very salient result occurred for example in the city of Mitaka (Tokyo), where they adopted the community school scheme at the same time as a nine-year comprehensive programme of elementary and junior high school, partly to cope with the transition to junior high schools. The teachers of both levels communicate with each other and exchange classes. As a result, there has been a very clear tendency that the satisfaction level of sixth graders and seventh graders, those two years that are more in contact with the teachers of the different schools, is very high compared to the children in other grades.

Students’ ability to comprehend or provide descriptive answers is particular to a school or region, so I don’t think there is any uniform positive or negative result in the community schools. However, there is a case in which one of the schools that was very troubled with violence, negligence and so forth, became a very good school in which students can study calmly by adopting the community school [approach], and by doing so were getting more support from the local residents. This doesn’t mean that all community schools are successful in creating that situation, but the community school provides a slight chance for the improvement of the school system in Japan and in that sense it is successful.

Abou Diarra (Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, Mali)

I would like to respond to that question on community schools. In Africa the concept of community school is linked to the relationship between community and schools. Schools are a foreign institution to our societies; brought by colonization. The state has taken upon itself to organize schools and to the people it seems that this is something for the state and by the state. Public schools are there in the village, but children don’t go to school and people are unconcerned. Buildings become dilapidated and no one cares because this is something that belongs to the state. However, when the people started to understand that schools have to be developed and created for the children, things started to change. They started to take ownership. When the communities have built the schools by themselves things have changed. Even when school is not in session, the community takes care to maintain the school buildings. Parents have contributed for the children to go to school, so they are concerned about whether their children actually attend school or not; whether they are benefitting. This is different from when the state was in charge.

Parents have started to understand that schools are their concern also. In Mali an assessment was conducted on academic performance in community and public schools. The performance in some community schools was better than that of the public schools. We have asked ourselves whether it was because teachers are better trained in community schools or is it because they have better teaching materials, or a better teaching framework than in public schools,

but it was none of these. We found that public school teachers were better trained, had more teaching materials, and were being visited on a more regular basis by inspectors and other support staff. The difference was that parents have taken ownership and they are present. This was the determining factor. So even though the teacher may not be highly qualified, they are more concerned for and take better care of the children. I'm not saying that all community schools are good schools and all public schools are bad schools. Rather, the fact that the people are thinking that they have to monitor, look after and pay the teachers and maintain the buildings makes a big difference. If it's anything that has to do with the school: school lunches, the cafeteria, it's very important that they take ownership. This is the attitude that we wanted to take from community schools and introduce in public schools through the CGS. So the government in 2004 decided to create CGS in public schools as well. These used to have PTAs, but the PTAs were not visiting schools every day, only being present when there were issues, whereas CGS are found in the field every day. The community has a role to play in public schools as well as in community schools.

In answer to the comment from my Moroccan colleague, I would like to say that I share his view. The experience that I presented was actually started in Niger and before starting our own project we went to Niger and had a look at what they were doing. Of course this was done with the support of JICA, but we saw in Niger how things were going and we worked very closely with Niger and JICA.

Every year JICA has a meeting with all the countries that are doing the same kind of experiment, which are Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger and my own country. We share our experiences. At last year's meeting in Mali the delegations from Niger, Senegal and Burkina Faso went into the field to see how things were working and to have exchanges with the committees. This year we will be in Burkina Faso to see how things have been implemented in there. It is important to share these things because we have similar realities as French-speaking African countries.

Question 6: Maria Teresa Félix (Cultural Attachée, Embassy of Angola)

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak here. I liked being here to enjoy the opportunity to learn about people and the world. When I look at the presentations of both professors, I see real differences: children in Africa really enjoy and crave the chance to have an education; children in Japan have the chance, but some of them don't want to go, based on what Professor Kaneko presented. I also see similarities: in Africa where some countries are really trying their best with these community associations. Before colonization, education was informal, conducted in houses and by sometimes by starlight. Then we changed to a different system that is still not accessible to everyone. What can we do to bridge the gap between these two worlds?

Question 7: Kentaro Fukuchi (Sudan Support for Special Education)

My questions are directed to Professor Diarra. The first is with regard to equity in the transfer of resources. There was an earlier statement to the effect that with regards to the equitable provision of funds by the government depends on the size of the school. However, isn't it also true that apart from the size of the school, how much funding can be sent to schools may depend on geography? Even if the size of the school is the same, if it's a rural or an urban school, the amount of funds that can be provided may vary.

The second relates to sustainability. Usually at the start of a project there is support from the World Bank and the government. In some community schools, after the pilot scheme is completed, how are the resources gathered so as to ensure the continuity of the community schools? What are the methodologies that have been employed?

Question 8: Andi Demo (Embassy of Albania)

I have a question for Professor Kaneko regarding school curriculum. In the past years there has been a tendency

favoring decentralization in Japan. Where does the government draw the line between decentralization and state control? I want to make a simple example which is the adoption of several rather controversial history textbooks by a few Japanese schools. Thank you.

Question 9: Eizo Shinohara (School/Community Coordinator - Saitama Municipal Shiwasaki Elementary School)

Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to ask a question. I serve in Saitama City as a local community/school coordinator. In the schools positive reforms have been happening since the mayor opted to introduce ‘Challenge Schools’, which are basically schools offering after-school or weekend activities that promote the relationship between the school and the local community. Now, Professor Kaneko, in Mitaka the school has volunteer parents who can support the class in terms of providing materials and giving attention to individual students. How are the activities being coordinated between the parents and these schools?

Ikuyo Kaneko (Professor, Graduate School of Media and Governance, and Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University)

Thank you very much for the questions. As I said in the first part of my speech, Japanese people tend to think that we are facing big problems, but these are very tiny problems of rich countries. We can do a lot more than we have been doing, according to Japanese society, who is more interested in education. I think today is a good opportunity for me to learn that we share the same philosophy, even while methods are different because the conditions are different. So it’s not only that other countries can learn a lot from community schooling in Japan, but we can also learn a lot from other countries; for example with the four countries in Africa getting together to exchange experiences. These things don’t happen in Asia. For example, we have few discussions between Japan and Korea, but we usually end up reconfirming each other, or just re-emphasizing that our systems are different. So I think we have to learn a lot from these [other countries’] practices.

I should mention that last year Japanese students’ international achievement exam scores increased slightly due to the fact that many schools and teachers put a lot of effort so that students would learn more creative thinking. Besides that, the fact that these children tend to be monotonous and not very responsive could be a result of the very vertical structure of the Japanese teaching system, which does not give opportunities for them to think by themselves.

There is a risk associated with decentralization. Parents and amateurs getting together to choose textbooks, for example, could create problems, but I don’t believe that using central authority could choose the right textbooks. We, various types of people, must have an opportunity to think for ourselves. Schools, regions and local governments will have to have the responsibility and at the same time the attitude to think for themselves. They will make mistakes, but they should have the opportunity and experience to correct themselves. I don’t think it is OK when the central authority says to do this and that. There is a very complex problem about textbooks in that the government says that it doesn’t assign textbooks but government actions have a procedure to influence this process. So there has to be more careful consideration on the textbook matters. I am of the opinion that you have to delegate the responsibilities as well as the authority to the people closer to the schools and education field so that they will make a choice in response to their situation and at the same time more accountable for what’s happening. Thank you very much.

Abou Diarra (Chief of Education Decentralization/Deconcentration Bureau, Ministry of Education, Literacy and National Languages, Mali)

I would like to respond to my friend from Angola about what we should do today in order to move forward in Africa. I do not know so much about the case of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, but looking at the history of

school in French-speaking Africa, we started with a centralized system where the government took all decisions and managed all human, financial and material resources for education. From independence until the 1990s, we maintained this centralized management of schools and we found out in the end that this kind of system was resulting in the training of elites. However, most of the children were dropping out and with this we were losing children and skills in countries where we lack skills and resources. So we had to think about how to most efficiently use the scarce resources that we had.

I think that the situation is changing with the democratic governments that are being set up in Africa as we saw recently in Tunisia, where the population is rising up to change the situation. We had the same thing in Mali a few years ago with the same popular movements that were saying that we do not agree with the governments that are set in place or with this centralized system. We want to be accountable for managing our own affairs, including schools. Therefore the constitutions that were set up after these popular uprisings were actually trying to answer the wishes of the population. We wanted to have a shared management. This is why we had decentralization. We wanted something that was efficient. We wanted the beneficiaries themselves to have some kind of responsibility in this management. This is why today if we want to improve our education system we need a shared management system; a decentralized system. Of course the state will have some authorities and competencies, but we also want involvement on the grass roots level. This is how the school will really answer the needs of the population and this is a system that will also help to find and train resources for the work market. This is why it is absolutely necessary to have a shared approach to the management of schools.

We started resource transfer two years ago and while I'm not saying that everything is working perfectly, we have adopted the principle, transferred resources and are now trying to manage the associated problems. It is true that we have to see which resources go where – I talked about the size of schools for example – but we have other criteria, including the economic potential of the communities. The communities themselves try to generate resources, but all local authorities do not have the same resources. For instance in the region nearer to the south of the country, close to Guinea or Côte d'Ivoire there are usually more resources, resulting in a better tax base, but in the North there are less means and they do not manage to raise funds from the population. So we have to take all these criteria into account in order to arrive at an equitable distribution of resources. It is up to the local authorities to make efforts to raise funds because the government, by itself cannot do this. We need to do this together and local authorities have their part to play.

Kazuhiro Yoshida (Professor, Center for the study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE), Hiroshima University)

Thanks very much to Professor Kaneko and Professor Diarra. Please give them a round of applause. With this we will close our morning session.