

Five years left until 2015: What should be our priority?

Charles Aheto-Tsegah
Director, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring & Evaluation Division,
Ministry of Education, Ghana.



Abstract

Supporting developing countries to breakthrough the diverse and numerous challenges confronting them in making quality education accessible has been a development imperative with the coming into force of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Education for All (EFA) principles. Five years to the target date for accessing results and impact, it is evident that many countries would miss the targets set. While enormous efforts have been made since 2000, it is important that lessons learnt in the key areas of access and quality should become the new priority focus. In addition, a new paradigm that shifts emphasis to enhancing capacity to deliver identified interventions and the appropriate targeting of resources to produce results should be initiated in developing countries.

Introduction

In addressing the issue of what priorities should drive efforts in achieving results in the remaining year to 2015, it is important to ask a number of questions that would place the global education development frameworks in within their historical perspectives. My contribution will take this course as I highlight the priorities for the period.

1. Did we evaluate Jomtien?

I have posed this question instead of the more controversial one, *was there a need for the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All?*, so as to avoid being misunderstood politically. Essentially I am seeking to ask what lessons we brought forward in developing the new frameworks. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Education for All (EFA) principles raise important systemic concerns for education development, they continue in the old mode as they fail to mention what has lately been identified as the 'four gaps' which are key limitations in the delivery of education in many developing countries. These are: lack of planning and implementation capacity; lack of sound policies; absence and/or inadequacy of good quality data; and the inadequacy of domestic and external financing needed for investment and recurrent expenditures¹.

On hindsight, if these were known the content of the MDG and the EFA should have identified specific achievable actions to address these key areas rather than the huge assumptions that the principles would work anyway.

2. What are the lessons learnt in access?

The three most recent UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Reports have highlighted progress made in improvements in the access. The Reports are very careful in noting that in spite of the progress there are still very glaring evidence of a large stock of out-of-school children, many in fragile states (thus raising another dimension to the access issue). The key lessons in access are that first, conflicts are a major disincentive for schooling; children not attending school at the right age; the equity challenge; and quality.

Access remains an important priority to pursue. Yet this must be done by carefully targeting new approaches to accessing basic education. I refer here to complementary models of providing education. If sub-Saharan African

¹ FTI Secretariat: *Fast Track Initiative: A global partnership to achieve Education for All*, 2008, Washington

countries would achieve UPE and MDG2 and 3, a new approach that emphasises complementary education must be adopted². In Ghana, this has proved very successful through the School for Life approach, which has encouraged the establishment of so-called Wing Schools in the northern parts of Ghana by CSO/NGOs in Education. Funding for this type of education must be included into the funding arrangements under the FTI.

Another key area in access that is currently gaining ground and requires more support is Early Childhood Education. In the 2006 UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report, this stage of education is described as ‘strong foundations’ yet it has eluded education systems in many developing countries. It took Ghana seven years to acknowledge this strong foundation and certain provinces in South Africa are currently working very hard to build a sustainable early childhood education. By strengthening this level of education many poor areas will gain access and continue schooling, while their parents are freed to engage in different forms of decent work to alleviate poverty. The challenge of children not attending school at the right age reduces with the growth of early childhood education.

3. The Quality Imperative

The lessons from pursuing quality in education systems reveal that there is a high correlation between direct support to teachers and improved performance. In many developing countries, efforts have been made to ensure compliance with the FTI benchmarks. Gambia’s support to teachers in rural deprived areas remains a touted best practice for the effect it had on both improving access and quality in rural schools.

Quality is an important factor in promoting access, as much as it is crucial in its own right. The quality focus is still very relevant but its link to finance continues to render it as a challenge. In the remaining period, the focus on quality has to be linked with improving the human capacity to manage implementation and to support the monitoring and evaluation processes. The teacher factor is important and clear indications demonstrated by the setting aside of funds to support teachers in poor and deprived communities should no longer be left to the decision-makers who would substitute the teacher for other competing quality concerns.

Pupil learning achievements has been overlooked in the current frameworks. Improvement in literacy and numeracy are necessary standards that encourage continued schooling and promote ability to learn. The concept of learning to read and reading to learn must be enforced and supported. The quality of pedagogy is essential here and every effort must be made to assist more teachers to acquire good methodologies in the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

4. Appropriate Targeting

The time has come to discriminate in the support provided to education system. There are two dimensions to this. First is the financing challenge and second is targeting more support to areas that are lagging behind in progress towards target achievement.

The financing challenge, also identified as one of the four gaps is crucial at this point. In view of limited resources, it is important to target resources to areas of real need. Deprived, poor and challenged communities require more financial support to improve on their education. This would require countries to properly assess their local performance and identify the areas of need. It is in this connection that targeting becomes very important. Here targeting can focus on using a means testing approach to determine needy pupils. This will ensure that interventions that require financing are provided for the beneficiaries who need it most. For example, in Ghana, infrastructure for Junior High School Education is targeted at areas where there are more than two primary schools to one Junior High School. This is expected to increase the number of children who transition from primary school to Junior high school as part of the efforts to achieve a 100% enrolment at the basic level. Targeting is also required in the provision of incentives for teachers. Areas

² Joseph Estefan et al.: *Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling*, December 2007, USAID pg.8

where the teacher gaps are acute should be supported and teachers in these areas provided all the support to remain at post.

5. Ownership, Accountability and Transparency

The remaining five years must be spent on strengthening accountability, ownership and transparency system in education systems. To achieve this, countries must re-examine their country systems and revise their processes to provide more confidence in the education system. Adequate guidance is needed for improving management of basic schools (pre-school, primary and lower secondary schools), while communities are empowered to demand accountability in the delivery of education services.

6. Conclusion

This is the period of innovation, managing with what is available, such as building on the progress made so far and responding to the evident challenges that continue to undermine progress. It is time to pay attention to the ‘critical small things’: improve planning, sending the school to the out-of school children (moving schools, shepherd schools, wing school by making it impossible for this category of children to have an excuse to be out of school); targeting the needy children, teachers, and areas with more resources.

I propose that for the next five years education performance must measure amongst others the following indicators annually:

- no. of reduction in out-of-school children
- No. of schools with no. of children enrolled in early childhood institutions.
- No. of schools conducting school performance appraisal meeting

Session 1

“Five Years Left until 2015: What Should be Our Priority?”

Presented by

Charles Aheto-Tsegah
Director, PBME Div., Min. of Education, Ghana

JAPAN EDUCATION FORUM VII
-COLLABORATION TOWARD GREATER
AUTONOMY IN EDUCATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT-

Introduction

2

- Our priorities for the remaining years to 2015 should be inspired by lessons learnt over the past years

Presentation will focus on the following:

- What did we learn from Jomtien?

Remaining 5 years is for application of lessons learnt from the implementation in:

- Access
 - The quality imperative
 - Targeting resources
 - Promoting ownership, accountability and transparency
- Conclusion

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

What did we learn from Jomtien?

3

- Education for all: A driving principle of Jomtien.
- The ‘four gaps’ (low planning and implementation capacity; lack of sound policies; absence and/or inadequacy of good quality data; inadequacy of finance – domestic and external to carry out needed investment and recurrent expenditures) major limitations in the delivery of education.
- MDG and EFA do not highlight these to be addressed but float in the assumption that the principles espoused will work anyway.

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

5 years More: Applying lessons learnt

4

1. **Access:** some of the key lessons are:

- Conflicts: a major disincentive for schooling
 - Children not attending school at the right age
 - Equity
 - Quality
- Priority should be placed on
- Promoting complementary education (Ghana Case: adoption of new Complementary basic education policy; School for life; Wing Schools) inadequate funding for these
 - More support to Early Childhood Education the ‘**strong foundation**’ (UNESCO, 2006 GMR), addresses problem of later age entry into school)

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

5

2. The quality imperative

- Teachers: Agents of Change are central to achieving this. Positive correlation between direct support to Teachers and improved learning achievement. **A GOOD teacher makes a GOOD difference**
- Pupil learning achievement: Focus on improving literacy, numeracy and life skills built on improved pedagogy and support to pupil learning. **When pupils learn to read, they read to learn.**

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

6

3. Appropriate Targeting

- 2 major considerations (financing; and identifying and reaching the needy)
- Financing : Targeting resources to areas of real need: deprived, poor and challenged communities)
- Identifying and reaching the needy: Adopting a means-testing approach to implementing interventions, give meaning to the interventions and produces better results

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

7

4. Ownership, Accountability and Transparency

- Strengthening, accountability, ownership and transparency principles. Requires intensive empowerment programmes for communities to demand results; Support to school management to respond to demands from community and to ensure accountability.
- School report cards and school performance appraisal meetings can help achieve this, these have to be supported.

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

Conclusion

8

Time to pay attention to the **critical 'small things'**.

- The Teacher, the Teacher, the teacher: lets make them **count** and **accountable**
- Send education to people and places: Lets get it straight **not every child will enrol in formal schooling**. Time for formal funding of complementary education.
- Every child deserves a Head-start: A good foundation in early childhood education is necessary.
- Give support to those who **really** need it

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

9

- New evidence of progress must measure and report on the following indicators:
 - Reduction in number of out-of-school children
 - No. of P1 children with early childhood education experience
 - No. of schools conducting performance appraisal meetings with school-community members
 - Number of teachers serving in deprived, poor and challenged communities

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010

10

Thank You for your attention.

Japan Education Forum VII - Feb. 3, 2010