

Meeting EFA: Cost-Effectiveness of Complementary Approaches

Introduction

National education systems have provided primary education to the great majority of school-age children in developing countries, but in many cases have failed to reach historically underserved populations. Across the developing world, the children not in school are often poor, isolated, and victimized by historic patterns of discrimination. Traditional education models hold little promise for meeting Education for All (EFA) goals of achieving access, completion, equity, and learning outcomes. With well-defined criteria for support, a clear set of metrics for evaluating sectoral policy and strategies, and a framework for aligning and committing external resources, the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) represents the best response to the monumental challenge of mobilizing resources to educate the world's poorest children.

However, the experiences of large-scale sector investment programs indicate that better use of additional resources is as much a challenge as mobilizing funding. Universal and equitable access to quality basic education requires devising innovative strategies to reach underserved populations. Additional resources for expanding and improving the government-run public education systems in many countries will not, by themselves, address the great majority of schools' problems in the most remote, poor, or disadvantaged areas. Entirely different approaches to governance, management, and accountability will also be required if quality basic education is to be made universally available at a cost that governments can afford.

This Issues Brief summarizes findings from case studies of three large-scale complementary models of providing basic education—School for Life in Ghana, Educatodos in Honduras, and Community Schools in Sikasso, Mali—which are available as part of the EQUIP2 Meeting EFA Country Briefs series. The analyses in each case study seek to answer two primary questions:

- Does the model contribute to EFA goals of access, completion, and learning?
- Does it do so in ways that are cost-effective?

Rather than focusing on the supply of donor funds for education, the case studies show that provision of quality education to underserved populations may rely on spending available resources differently to achieve better results. Instead of building government capacity to expand public schools to underserved regions, enlisting and building the capacity of a whole range of civic actors represents a cost-effective option to meeting EFA among particular groups.

The Cases

The Ghana School for Life and Mali Community Schools projects serve populations in regions where access to the public education system is severely limited. The Honduras



Educatodos program provides students, young adults, and older citizens who have dropped out of school opportunities to obtain basic education through alternative means. All three programs deliver schooling equivalent to the formal public curriculum and are designed and implemented by civil society actors with involvement and support from all levels of the education system. However, they each use alternative approaches to staffing, management, and accountability. These three particular case studies are relevant to FTI because they:

- Show how complementary models affect access, completion, and learning;
- Shed additional light on the financial requirements of EFA—not just for access, but also for achieving completion and learning;
- Provide examples of different ways to use and manage resources; and
- Provide insight into policy and institutional arrangements needed to more rapidly expand and improve the delivery of basic education.

Ghana

School for Life targets villages where there is no formal school or where enrollment in basic education is extremely low. It provides schooling in 767 communities, reaching approximately 25 percent of the villages in eight districts of Ghana's Northern Region. In each of the last five years, School for Life averaged 9,000 enrollees in its nine-month version of grades one to three, with 91 percent of students completing the program, according to the case study. Of those who complete, 66 percent continue to fourth grade in a formal school, an increase over public schools of 60 percent. Moreover, the case study found that School for Life is over three times as cost-effective as traditional public schools in Ghana at producing a grade three completer.

According to the School for Life February 2004 *End of 8th Cycle Report*, 52 percent of children tested at the end of the nine-month three-grade School for Life cycle could read with comprehension, calculate with mastery, and write. Eighty-one percent met a minimum level of competency. This translates into a cost per learning outcome of \$52 per student. Comparatively, results from annual tests given to a 10 percent national sample of public school sixth graders show only 9 percent achieve minimum competency in English. Assuming the same percentage of third graders meet a competency standard in language studies, the public school cost per learning outcome at that level would be \$1,500.

Mali

In Malian villages with Community Schools, the gross admission rate into primary school reached 96 percent in 2003, compared to 48 percent for Sikasso public schools. According to Save the Children's *Annuaire statistique des écoles communautaires, rentrée scolaire, 2002–2003*, Community Schools in Sikasso report a grade six completion rate of 67 percent overall and 57 percent for girls, 20 and 16 percent more effective, respectively, than national public schools. Community Schools also increased the first-grade-equivalent gross intake capacity of seven-year-olds from 46 to 61 percent and net admission rate from 39 to 53 percent nationally in 2002-2003.

In contrast to access and completion rates, the Mali case study found that Community Schools are less cost-effective at producing grade six completers than government schools. However, Community Schools serve a population that would otherwise not have access to school, and this should be compared to what it would cost the government to extend access to the villages served by Community Schools, not just the cost of running the existing system. The 2003 primary education leaving exam (CEP) pass rate for public schools in the Kolendieba subregion of Sikasso, Mali was 43 percent, compared to 51 percent in Community Schools, translated into costs per learning outcome of \$749 and \$825 per student, respectively. It is interesting to note that unit cost in Community Schools is 57 percent higher than in public schools, but the cost per completer is only 31 percent higher, and the cost per learning outcome is only 10 percent higher because, according to the case study, Community Schools are more effective at producing sixth grade completers who can pass the CEP.

Honduras

In 2003, Educatodos enrolled 117,656 students in Honduras with 13,000 in the grade-seven-to-nine-equivalent program and the remainder in the grade-one-to-six-equivalent program. Since its inception in 1996, Educatodos has enrolled over 500,000 students. Rates of completion for both Educatodos and public primary schools are between 60 and 70 percent. The Educatodos grade-seven-to-nine-equivalent program began in 2001 and has enrolled approximately 23,500 students. An average of 54 percent complete ninth grade, compared to 32 percent in public schools.

The Honduras case study found that Educatodos is almost five times as cost-effective as public schools at producing a grade six completer. For grades seven to nine, the case study found that Educatodos has both a higher completion rate and much lower costs, making it 15 times as cost-effective as the public system at producing a grade nine completer. An external evaluation found 67 percent of Educatodos grade seven to nine students achieved mastery of fourth-grade-equivalent Spanish, compared to 62 percent in public schools, though results for both cases declined significantly when held to sixth and seventh grade standards.

Implications for FTI

The implications of this study and ongoing research into complementary models for providing basic education include the following:

- The challenge of EFA can only be met through a variety of strategies aimed at reaching underserved populations and regions within each country.
- Civil society organizations that act as intermediaries and reinforce decentralized capacity to promote and organize basic education are key to those strategies.
- Analysis of the cost-effectiveness of different approaches shows how resources can be used more effectively.
- The cost of meeting EFA must include estimates of the costs of producing basic education completers with demonstrated learning, not just the cost of access.



The lesson of complementary models is that basic education can be organized through different approaches that rely more on local and nongovernmental actors than the formal system. The challenge is to incorporate these strategies into the sector investment programs that draw the bulk of government and external financing and attention. The case studies show that complementary models contribute to EFA goals primarily by targeting underserved populations and modeling more democratic and decentralized approaches to school provision. During the next decade, organizations should focus on how to use sector investment strategies to not only accommodate and expand complementary approaches to basic education, but also significantly increase quality.

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