

ENHANCING PRO-POOR PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ELDORET

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CHALLENGE

In 2003, the new government of Kenya adopted a policy designed to ensure that all primary aged children enrol and continue to stay in school. The policy was to be implemented in conformity with domestic needs and the international conventions Kenya is a party to, which call for the provision of universal primary education. As part of fulfilling promises made pre-election, the government quickly declared Free Primary Education (FPE) nationwide. The response was immediately overwhelming. Between 2002 and 2004, schools registered an 11% increase in primary enrolment, with 1.5 million additional children accessing primary education each year. Furthermore, the growth in gender parity in primary schools was encouraging. In 2004, for instance, 3.5 of 7.4 million primary school students in the country were girls.

At the same time, a number of unanticipated negative implications resulted from the move:

- Schools were filled beyond their capacities, overstretching available resources. In spite of government budget support, expansion of needed school facilities did not match the needs of an exploding student population;
- Parents, thinking they had voted in a government to provide free education, no longer felt the need to help their schools raise resources;
- The student/teacher ratio shot up, reaching 120 in some schools, so that students were getting less attention from teachers; therefore, the quality of education started to decline, raising concerns on the part of all stakeholders;
- As a result, enrolment in government schools then began to drop so that by 2006 there were a large number of children not attending schools – the success of FPE was being undermined by the declining enrolment of underprivileged pupils.

INITIATIVE

The SNV Kenya North Rift Portfolio conducted an initial enquiry into the state of primary education. A 2003 UNESCO and Kenya government study of the challenges facing FPE provided an initial input to the SNV enquiry. According to the report, many parts of the country, especially the pastoral communities and slums, were badly affected by the FPE challenges. This led the team in Eldoret to study the problems of primary education in slum areas, visiting the slum area of Langas with the Eldoret Municipal Education Officer (MEO).

Although government primary schools in the area were full, the MEO believed there were still 15,000 primary aged children not in school, despite the FPE policy. He noted that since enactment of the FPE policy, the number of children in government schools had, in fact, declined and many of the children who should have been at school were either on the streets, back in their villages, or had transferred to private schools. His report showed that in 2003 enrolment had shot up to 40,000, but had since declined to 36,000. Langas Primary School alone saw the figure drop from 4,000 children in 2003 to 2,700. Where did these children go and what were the reasons for the big drop in numbers?

On further exploration, it was found that although congestion was responsible for the exit of students, the attitude of parents in the slum areas also played a significant role: they did not see the value of education for their children. As one lady put it "all I need is for my child to know how to bake a mandazi". In some cases, children had to work at home so their parents could attend to the more urgent issues of family survival.

The problem of declining enrolments also hinged on school management and administration. To gather better insight, the team visited Tuiyobei, a public school which was faced with the same challenges as Langas but had benefited from the

FPE policy. The performance of Tuiyobei in the national exams had been going up since the introduction of FPE. The head teacher and the school committee attributed the good performance to positive collaboration between the parents and teachers, initiated by the head teacher. . After confirmation that some children had left schools due to poverty-related issues, there was a further need to probe into the whereabouts of other children, especially those in the private schools.

A subsequent enquiry into enrolments in private schools in the Langas slum area of Eldoret revealed that, since FPE implementation, many private schools had sprung up in the community. Many of the students in these schools had transferred from government schools because they were too congested, with unacceptably high student/teacher ratios and, consequently, low educational standards. Private schools were filling a substantial niche within the overall primary education system in Eldoret. Yet, discussions with these schools and with the MEO indicated that there were a myriad of challenges limiting the potential of these private schools to fulfil the needs, notably the rift between them and the government system. For instance, on the one hand the municipal authorities were tasked with regulating the schools and enforcing national educational quality standards, including minimum classroom size and land area. On the other hand, many private schools were providing services in areas of extreme poverty, were charging minimal fees, were staffed by low-paid or voluntary teachers, and could not meet some of the physical standards. Insistence by the municipal authorities on collecting trading licence fees from private schools, coupled with harassment because they did not meet the stipulated standards, had resulted in many private schools being forced to close down. The practice of giving preferential access for limited secondary school places to government primary school graduates had further distanced private schools from the government.

Today, the MEO does not know how many private schools there are in the municipality, nor the number of children in these schools. There are approximately 70 more schools than the known 50. Insufficient support to private schools from the government and blind focus on standards was apparently threatening the availability of private school places. Clearly something innovative needed to be done about the situation. Consistent with its mandate and objectives, and recognising the needs and challenges in the local context, SNV looked for suitable partners that could help achieve the FPE goal.

A partner: The Kenya Private Sector Schools Association

The Kenya Private Sector Schools Association (KPSA) is a membership organisation that exists to support private schools, to help them raise resources for expansion, to foster inter-school learning and to advocate for educational policy changes. A visit by SNV representatives to the Eldoret branch of KPSA revealed a network organisation that was almost totally dysfunctional. It was without an office and even basic data about its membership. Its decreasing membership was predominantly inactive. In a cut-throat competition, the private schools were poaching teachers and students from each other. They had not realised that they needed to collaborate with each other and attract children from outside their catchment areas. Furthermore, there was a tenuous relationship with the national office of KPSA: only a few registered schools attended AGM meetings. Many schools were not even aware that there was such an association. Each school acted on a limited information base, many unaware of neighbouring schools. When aware of each other, the schools saw each other as competitors. Schools did not know how to access loans for expansion, or have recourse when harassed by government officials. Parents defaulted on school fees by frequently transferring children from one school to another without the consent of the schools.

As a potentially significant client who could access the unknown world of private schools and their capacities to provide additional places in Eldoret, SNV engaged KPSA as a client and, in April 2007, started to work with it on rebuilding the KPSA membership base in Eldoret. Among the results achieved through the partnership, to date, are:

- Today, the KPSA Eldoret branch has more than 20 registered members and more than 100 schools regularly attend its meetings.
- KPSA has engaged professional staff, has an office, has set up a desk to liaise with educational stakeholders, and has signed a deal with Equity Bank to secure subsidised loans for its member schools to expand.

- KPSA has established a set of thematic committees, each to settle matters such as examinations, procurement, education ethics, and so on.
- KPSA, Eldoret now has functional links with the head office, regularly attending meetings and tapping into the national office initiatives.
- It has formally started working to address policy issues with respect to standards and securing secondary school places for their graduates.
- It has further set an achievable target to secure 5,000 additional school places by May 2008, a goal that all member schools are working together to meet.
- The MEO and KPSA have started to meet on a regular basis with the realisation that private schools can help substantially to achieve the FPE target by relieving some of the pressure on public schools. The MEO has opened up a permanent desk to address the interests of private schools, and has engaged KPSA as a partner to meet the FPE target of 15,000 new enrolments. Moreover, the MEO is joining with KPSA to present evidence to the central government regarding the adverse effect of blind enforcement of school standards. Prior to SNV's involvement, the two sides did not have a clear working arrangement. Now, there is a healthy engagement and a growing relationship based on shared goals.
- The membership of KPSA is spreading to all the areas of North Rift region and the KPSA national office has approached SNV for similar support for other branches country-wide.

Furthermore, SAYARE, a local radio and TV station, has become attracted to the agenda of the private schools in Eldoret. The new relationship between the MEO and KPSA is resulting in a series of panel discussion broadcasts around pro-poor education services, access of street children to schools and a growing agenda that is being informed by the experience of this new collaboration. The programme that kicked off in November 2007 has become an eye-opener, informing the public about the role of private schools in education, and reducing the misapprehensions and negative publicity hitherto held that the private schools were merely businesses not interested in the quality of education. Initial capital for the programme came from SNV, but it is now attracting many private sector players who would like to be associated with the programme. Individual schools are paying to air their individual issues for self promotion. The impact of the initiative has started to bear fruit. The Testimony School, for one, can no longer respond to the growing demand for school spaces, a demand generated by the increased awareness among parents about the benefits of taking children to private schools. Little Lambs Academy is may have to expand to a 3rd stream, because parents are calling for more school spaces. The objective of KPSA is to pull more children from public schools in order to create space in the public schools for the children from the less fortunate families. Through the same programme, KPSA is encouraging private schools to start their own secondary schools and address the problem of poor transition to secondary schools. KPSA is now planning to institutionalise the programme for wider outreach.

IMPACT

The great strides made by KPSA in increasing its membership, its capacity and scale of operation qualify it as a capacity development provider. For this reason, SNV is in discussions with KPSA, to explore if and how SNV can support it as a local capacity builder (LCB) to provide services to other stakeholders in education. As an LCB, KPSA will strengthen the capacity of other stakeholders in education. For example, under consideration are enabling the TV programme to cover the work of other stakeholders, providing examinations to both public and private schools, studying in-depth baseline with the MEO to authenticate various data, and capacitating development services to the various entities in education. KPSA, with a private sector touch, is flexible, entrepreneurial, credible, and well-networked and has a national outlook. KPSA is partnering with Science Clippings, a renowned technical education provider in Eldoret. It may be one of the best LCBs that SNV can support.

In response to opportunities that came from the SNV corporate body signing an e-learning agreement with Oracle, SNV facilitated a cross visit to the E-Learning Africa event in Nairobi for 15 persons from private and public schools. The respective schools were put in direct touch with Oracle and members of the E-Learning Africa consortium of ICT companies. This has resulted in some schools being able to expand their places and learning innovations, to procure equipment and set up computer labs. In a meeting of Oracle and the members of the Eldoret e-learning schools, Oracle pledged to help schools use computers for teaching and administration. In this arrangement, Oracle will design administration software

suitable for private and public schools. In addition, Oracle has invited Learnthings, specialised in developing digital content with animations for school curricula, to discuss the possibility of digitising the local school syllabus with a view to up-scaling it to the national level through dialogue with the government and other stakeholders. The software will be available to about 30 Eldoret schools on a trial basis from January, 2008.

Realising that the e-learning process will only succeed if teachers understand it, there is a plan, starting in March 2008, to train teachers in order to integrate e-learning for the regular delivery of the curriculum. The e-learning consortium of schools, an emergent establishment from the initiative, is slowly becoming institutionalised, having appointed interim officials to run the members' programme. This consortium, which draws its membership from both private and public primary and secondary schools from the region, is seeking a formal relationship with SNV, for capacity-building and support to link up with more local, national and international ICT providers. This engagement will culminate in concrete assignments to focus attention on pro-poor education services in Eldoret. Oracle has invited these schools to participate in an e-learning conference planned for May, 2008 in Ghana. A number of people from these schools are preparing papers to present at this conference.

Following a discussion with the Eldoret Municipal Council, SNV was asked to help them address the problem of the growing numbers of street children in Eldoret. One enthusiastic organisation, the Ex Street Children Community Organisation (ECCO) approached SNV for assistance. It was apparent that they had excellent relations with street children and were trusted by them, but they had poor relations with key street children service providers, including children's homes and the municipal council. As an organisation, they were without resources, systems, office space and were entirely reliant on the enthusiasm of a few people. Today, ECCO has been provided with an office and operation space by the municipal authorities. They have commenced work on documenting individual cases of street children, taking some off the street, and providing means for children to go to school. They now are aiming to involve 2,000 street children in the new opportunities that the private school system is offering, and have negotiated free places for the children in some of these schools.

The role of SNV in this has been to build the relationship of ECCO officials with those of other stakeholders, linking them to institutions with technical skills. These have included:

- The police, law courts and HIV Aids institutions,
- AMPATH, a project of the University of Arizona (USA),
- Berur, a small NGO recently founded by a group of Norwegians,
- The Central Bank of Kenya is planning to purchase school uniforms for the children,
- The Commissioner of Human Rights in Nairobi has pledged to support it fully.

The thrust of the intervention was the relationship with the municipal council of Eldoret which has been able to tap into the support of ECCO to achieve government targets of removing children from the streets. The council now recognises the role it has in the rehabilitation of street children, and it has earmarked Ksh. 1.8m for the programme in 2008.

By focussing on the specific issue of primary education, taking normative data as a starting point, and enquiring into the complex education system in Eldoret, SNV continues to engage a mosaic of stakeholders from within the government, the private sector and civil society. By enabling these groups to interact with one another and explore what they can mutually offer, SNV has potentially unlocked the problem of the shortage of school places. The solution clearly lies within the community, and SNV has played a key role so far in enabling individual actors to improve what they do, and help the collective behave more coherently. Making informal contacts, being open-minded to ideas from the local level, high profile organisations, and individuals in the society, and taking advantage of every opportunity that presents itself has been the driving force behind the success of the initiative.

LESSONS LEARNED