

# **Quality Education: Oxfam Novib's Position**



# Foreword

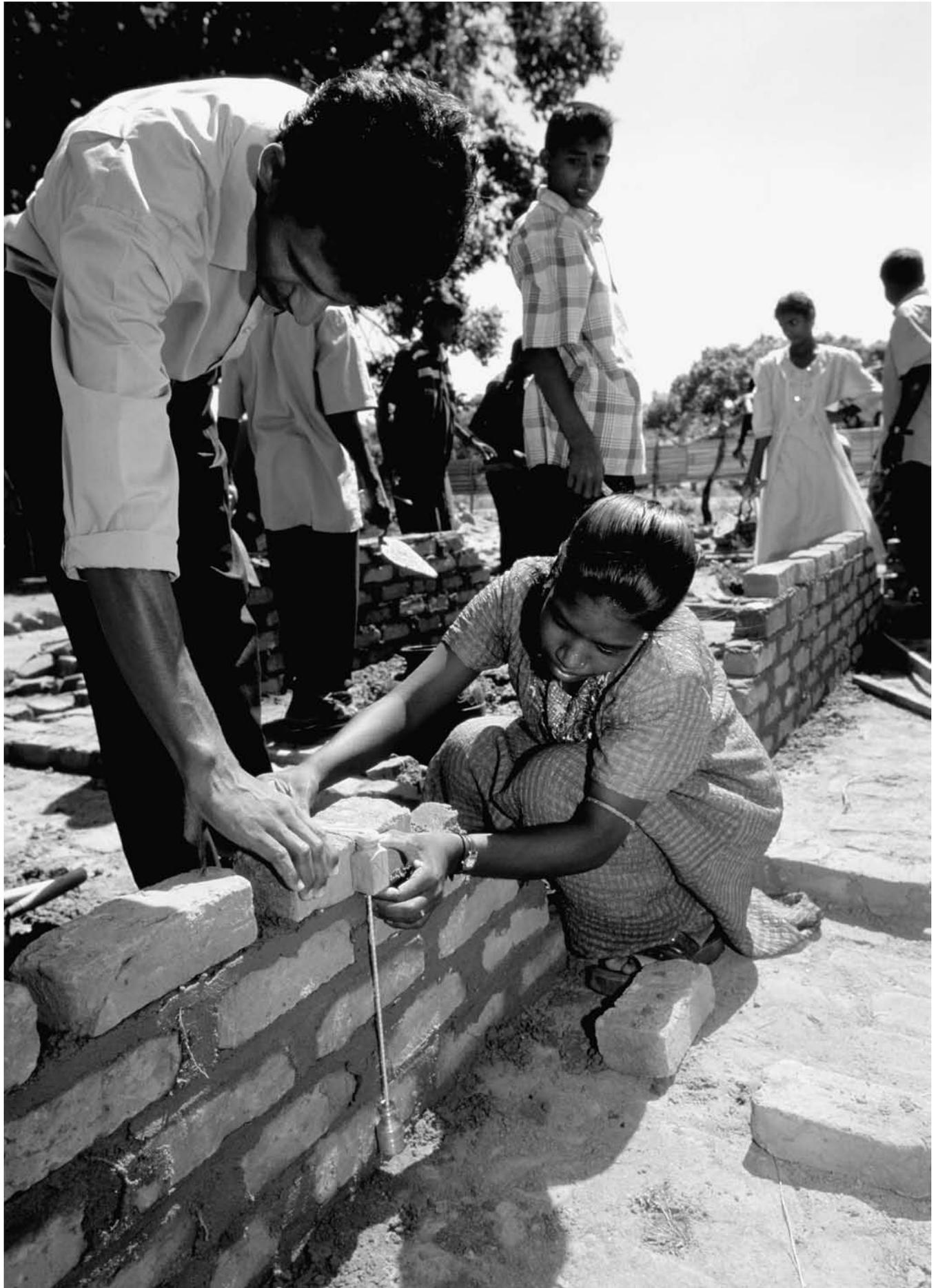
Education can transform societies through individual and collective empowerment and building vibrant democracies which include the voices of women and other disadvantaged people. However, to do this, the objective of education needs to be more than raising reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Oxfam Novib's conviction is that we and other actors should be explicitly seeking *quality* education which enhances equity and justice by being gender just, promoting active citizenship, and being contextualized to local needs.

I am pleased to present this new paper on quality education, which sets out our position and proposes key strategies for promoting education aimed at improving equity and justice. One of our strategies is to learn from innovative practices in formal and non-formal education, in particular approaches concerning gender, intercultural education, HIV/AIDS prevention, non-violent conflict resolution and active citizenship. By building bridges between non-formal and formal education systems we hope to exploit the strengths of both approaches, for the good of quality education for all.

Every child without a good education has his or her potential and future stolen. Girls in particular are then owned, worked and abused by others with more power than them. They are likely to care for many but have little opportunity to feel their own needs, or to raise their own voices. Through education we can help them to find their voice, their potential and their freedom.

There are already international commitments to provide education for all which must be fulfilled. We hereby commit ourselves to seek and support *quality education* while we work towards our mission: a Just World without Poverty.

*Sylvia Borren*



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# Acronyms

ACAPES	The Cultural Association of Social and Educational Self Promotion
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
EFA	Education for All
EIW	Education Initiative for Water
EPEP	Ecumenical Popular Education Programme
GCAP	Global Call to Action Against Poverty
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GCN	Girl Child Network
GPI	Girls Power Initiative
IEP	Institute d'Education Populaire / Institute for Popular Education
KIC	Knowledge Infrastructure with and between Counterparts
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
RBA	Rights-Based Approach

# Executive summary

The right to education is a universal human right, and one denied to millions: not only those who are not in school, but also the large proportion of children who attend school and yet leave without gaining the minimum set of cognitive and life skills.

In addition to being a right in itself, education is an enabling right, one which when fulfilled permits the exercise of other rights. However, for education to have its powerful transformative effects, it needs not only to impart literacy and numeric skills, but also to promote individual flourishing and freedom as well as social change.

This paper sets out Oxfam Novib's position on the importance of the quality of education – why we and all agencies should be attending to the content of curricula, the teaching methods used, the stakeholders involved, and the overall purpose of education. We argue that the current focus of governments and donors on improving enrolment levels without improving quality is not acceptable, and we hold states accountable to their commitments to provide quality basic education to all.

Whilst we concur with UNESCO's and UNICEF's definitions of a quality education, we believe additionally that for education to transform societies it is essential that the process is permeated with an overriding purpose of *pursuing greater equity and justice*. To focus our minds on the need for education to create individual and collective empowerment to further equity and justice, we propose three principles which should guide our work aimed at achieving quality education. These are that the work should:

- be gender-just;
- promote active citizenship;
- be contextualized to local needs.

This paper also outlines practical strategies based on the three principles, which are relevant both for advocacy and for work within educational systems and communities. These strategies concern the enabling inputs which help produce quality education: namely the teachers and their teaching, the school materials including the curricula, and the educational systems comprising the schools and administrative bodies. Our suggested strategies are:

- Supporting teachers to be agents of change, enabling them to become facilitators of learning;
- Supporting female teachers and female leadership in schools and educational systems;
- Advocating for and developing transformative curricula which are contextualized and stimulate problem-solving, including comprehensive and empowering sexuality education;
- Promoting accountable and transparent education systems through community participation in the management of schools and education systems.

Despite improvements in enrolment levels, we are failing in our collective responsibility to meet the right for all to education, and to guarantee rights *in* education. If education is to enable the exercise of other rights, and to further progress to equity and justice, it must be *quality* education. Oxfam Novib commits itself to making this a priority within its education work, and urges other organizations to do likewise.



# 1 Introduction

The proportion of children enrolled in primary school is now higher than ever: within developing countries, the percentage of primary school age children enrolled in school rose from 80% in 1990/1991 to 88% in 2004/2005 (UN 2007). In sub-Saharan Africa, which has the lowest enrolment levels, the proportion rose from 54% to 70%.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite these gains in enrolment, in many parts of the world, an enormous gap persists between the numbers of students graduating from school and those among them who master the minimum set of cognitive skills, let alone the creative, emotive and life skills to be gained from education (EFA 2005). In rural India, for example, a third of children in classes 3 to 5 cannot read easy paragraphs suited to those in class 1, nor do subtraction (ASER 2006:35). Enrolling children in school is one thing: keeping them in school and enabling them really to learn is another.

Since the early 1990s, Oxfam Novib<sup>2</sup> has used the agendas of *Education for All* (EFA) and the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) as a framework for its education work, focussing particularly on access to education, especially for girls. This work and that of our counterparts and allies has contributed to increased attention and finance for Education for All at national and international levels.<sup>3</sup> Whilst there is still much to do with regard to access to education, we feel the time is now ripe to make our position on the significance of *quality education* more explicit.

This paper is written for development practitioners and donors. It draws on the positive experiences of Oxfam Novib's counterparts and of other organizations that have been documented and shared in Oxfam's knowledge management program, KIC.<sup>4</sup> We hope it will be stimulating in its exploration of what quality education means in both abstract and practical terms. For readers within Oxfam Novib, it provides ideas about how we and our counterparts might promote quality education, and sets parameters for the innovative work we have planned on education as part of our business plan for 2007-2010. We expect that these innovative interventions will lead to further discussion with counterparts and within Oxfam international, and an update of this position paper in years to come.

The paper starts by explaining how a Rights-Based Approach is at the foundation of Oxfam's position on education in general (Section 2). In Section 3 we define quality education and present the three pillars that determine our vision on quality education. We suggest some strategies for Oxfam Novib, our counterparts and other actors in Section 4, and summarise our position and our next steps in Section 5.

<sup>1</sup> Despite progress on enrollment, the Global Campaign for Education estimates that 75 countries will not achieve Millennium Development Goal 2 that by 2015 all children will be able to complete primary school, let alone the more broad Education For All agenda which includes quality targets.

<sup>2</sup> Known as Novib prior to our name change in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> An evaluation of Oxfam's work on education concluded: "The global campaign contributed to a positive shift in the international terms of debate between 1999 and 2005, which has led to some quantifiable, positive policy outcomes on increasing primary education for girls, especially in Africa." (Evaluation of the Oxfam International Strategic Plan, 2001-2006).

<sup>4</sup> The Knowledge Infrastructure with and between Counterparts (KIC: [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org)) project aims to promote learning between Oxfam, its counterparts and other knowledge bearers through the documentation and sharing of good, bad and new practices.



## 2 Education and rights

*Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the UN for the maintenance of peace.*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 26.<sup>5</sup>

Basic education<sup>6</sup> has always had a prominent place in our work, and Oxfam Novib has, since the mid 1990s, committed itself to spend 20% of its budget to activities furthering the right to basic social services, which includes education.<sup>7</sup>

### Box 2.1 The Global Campaign for Education

The GCE initiative, founded in 1999, unites NGOs and teachers' unions in over 150 countries to focus on promoting education as a basic human right. Mobilizing a powerful advocacy network, they have put public pressure on governments and the international community to fulfill their promises *"to provide free, compulsory public basic education for all people; in particular children, women and all disadvantaged, deprived sections of society"*. The campaign states that quality education for all is achievable, and emphasizes that exclusion from education translates into growing poverty, inequality and deprivation.

It is rights-based because it advocates for education as:

- A universal human right;
- The key to poverty alleviation and sustainable human development;
- A core responsibility of the state;
- Achievable if governments mobilize the political will and available resources.

The *GCE demands* that the international community and governments of the South take immediate action to implement the *Education for All goals* and strategies agreed by 185 world governments at Dakar in April 2000.

[www.campaignforeducation.org](http://www.campaignforeducation.org)

In 2000, the Oxfam International strategic plan *'Towards Global Equity'* committed all Oxfam affiliates to using a rights-based approach (RBA), with a strong emphasis on economic and social rights. The Oxfams also committed themselves to becoming a campaigning confederation, building a movement of global citizens to show how rights-based development can constitute *"a powerful political commitment to justice"* (Oxfam International 2000). In the education sector, this has led to our active involvement with global campaigns that incorporate rights-based approaches,

<sup>5</sup> *The Right to Education is also established in many other human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (articles 28 and 29) and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 13).*

<sup>6</sup> *We use UNESCO's definition of Basic Education which includes primary school, the first years of secondary, adult education, and some forms of vocational training.*

<sup>7</sup> *Our commitment arose from the 20/20 initiative, which we developed following the Copenhagen Social Summit and the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, in response to the devastating impacts which economic and financial crises and structural adjustment policies were having on expenditure on basic social services. The 20/20 initiative invited governments receiving overseas development aid to increase their expenditure on basic social services to 20% by committing donor countries to increase their aid allocations in these sectors to 20% as well. At this time Oxfam Novib and other NGOs also established the Social Watch platform to monitor governments' renewed commitment to sustainable development.*

including the International March Against Child Labour, the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) and the Global Campaign for Education (see Box 2.1).

Participation, accountability, the universality and interdependence of rights, non-discrimination and equality are important characteristics of a rights-based approach. A focus on rights goes beyond responding to needs and implies identifying the corresponding duties. The latter entails an analysis of power relations, between women and men, at the global level, within a society, or at the household level. By giving greater emphasis to the impact of power inequalities in the development process, and by identifying duties and rights of duty-bearers and rights-holders respectively, Oxfam hopes to break the vicious cycle of poverty (Brouwer et al 2005). However, the real impact of the rights-based approach remains to be seen. Oxfam Novib uses five key RBA elements to assess its work: analysing the underlying causes of poverty and injustice; identifying rights-holders and duty-bearers; including beneficiaries/rights-holders in development process; working from a holistic perspective; working from human rights principles; (Oxfam Novib 2006a). Whilst many challenges remain in implementing a rights-based approach, it certainly lies at the foundation of our present position on education.

## 2.1 Education: a right in itself and an enabling right

A rights-based approach means support for the fulfilment and protection of all rights. Oxfam is attending to the whole spectrum of rights by focussing its mission on five rights-based aims to bring about justice and social change.<sup>8</sup> The right to education falls within AIM 2: the Right to Basic Social Services and is defined as follows:

*All children living in poverty will achieve their right to a good quality basic education, and adults living in poverty will have educational opportunities to help them to overcome poverty.*

Note that whilst all five aims are ends in themselves they are also interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The right to education in particular is an *enabling* right: one which, when fulfilled, permits the exercise of other rights. For example, we know that education is positively related to better health outcomes, more secure livelihoods, and the exercise of political and civil rights and the right to an identity. But for education to enable in this way, and to deliver its intrinsic worth, it needs to be the kind of education that promotes individual flourishing and freedom as well as social harmony.

## 2.2 Rights-holders and duty-bearers in education

The majority of states have ratified international conventions affirming their citizens' right to education. We believe that the responsibility to ensure the right to education for all is first and foremost held by the state as the prime duty-bearer, though this can imply involving other actors. This is because the state is the only institution that can be held accountable to ensure that both access and quality in education is guaranteed for all in society, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, faith, caste or sexual orientation. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Katarina Tomasevski set out the state's human rights obligations as the four A's of Education: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability (UN ECOSOC 2002). Another way of

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<sup>8</sup> These are the Right to Sustainable Livelihoods, the Right to Basic Social Services, the Right to Life and Security, the Right to be Heard, and the Right to an Identity.

conceiving this is to frame it as securing not only the right *to* education but also securing rights *in* education (GCE & ActionAid 2007). To do this the state must, for example, include indigenous populations and their right to bilingual education. It must include poor populations in remote areas where few teachers venture. It must ensure that education is free from physical or sexual violence. And it should teach acceptance of difference in all its facets, including different religions, languages, cultures, abilities and sexual orientations.

However, despite their binding obligations, many states treat education as if it were a discretionary good. For example, states spend more on military spending than they do on basic education, and within the education sector their spending is usually skewed away from basic education, which, as a right, has a prior claim over tertiary education. Many donors fare no better. The GCE's 2007 'school report' on donors' performance (GCE 2007) indicates that their assistance to basic education has declined recently to \$3 billion a year, much less than the minimum of \$9 billion needed annually to get all children attending school, and far from the \$16 billion needed to realize all EFA goals, including ensuring a quality education for all.<sup>9</sup> Among them the US, for example, is providing just 22% of its share of the minimum needed, whilst France is giving 61% of its share, yet allocates only about a quarter of its education aid to basic education. Remarkably, The Netherlands gives more than twice its share of funding to basic education, but could do much more to focus that aid on the poorest countries and those with the greatest gender disparity in enrolments. We believe that to achieve quality education we need not only more aid, but also better quality of aid: donors should concentrate resources on quality basic education, make long-term aid commitments so that national governments can plan for the recurrent costs related to quality education, and focus aid on those countries most in need, including those emerging from conflict.

Oxfam Novib has a duty to hold governments to their obligation to ensure free primary education and to make sure post-primary education is accessible and available to all (including free education and financial assistance schemes).<sup>10</sup> However, where states are failing to meet their obligations, we will work with counterparts who not only advocate for access to quality education, but also innovate around providing it, such as Pratham's work outlined in Box 2.2. We also work with our counterparts and within campaigns to influence other duty-holders; for example, training teachers to fulfill their duty to impart quality education, influencing parents to meet their responsibility to send their children to school, and persuading employers not to employ children.

Of course, our counterparts are non-government not-for-profit organizations. What of the role of the private sector? We recognise that it can, in certain circumstances, deliver much needed finance as well as promote innovation and efficiency. But this is only possible as part of a publicly led and well-regulated system over which the citizenry can exercise democratic control (Oxfam International 2006). The market on its own will never provide equitable services; indeed, the privatization of education tends to privilege the rich and deny the poor access. With this in mind, Oxfam Novib is open to cooperation with the private sector, such as public-private partnerships and internships in vocational and secondary schooling, providing the government puts in adequate measures to safeguard quality and access for all.

<sup>9</sup> Whilst the sums sound large, if all G7 countries gave their share of the \$9 billion needed the additional \$5 billion a year would be enough to send 75% of all out of school children to school. \$5 billion is the cost of just four US stealth bomber planes (GCE 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See articles 28.1a) and 28.1b) of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

**Box 2.2 Making education for all the business of all the case of Pratham in India****The situation**

47% of pupils in grade 5 cannot read a text that they should have been able to read in grade 2.

**Pratham's response**

Pratham has launched the Read India campaign aimed at achieving reading and arithmetic proficiency for all children in the country within and outside the school system by 2009. They use their L2R (Learn to Read) in 90 days methodology. To run this campaign Pratham involves:

- volunteers and government child service workers (Anganwadi) from *the community* who work with pupils and their mothers outside of school (e.g. during the summer school campaign) to raise their reading levels. University students and volunteers play an important role in getting data at district and block level for Pratham's annual monitoring report on the quality of education in India.
- *the government* provides access for Pratham to train the teachers in schools on how to use the L2R methodology.
- the national and multinational *corporate sector* provides financial resources to support the *Read India* campaign. Pratham has lobbied the sector on their responsibility not to employ children of school going age.

**The results**

Pratham's previous L2R campaigns have lead to significant improvements in children's reading levels and have also improved the motivation of teachers and educational administrators.

We believe that education should be considered a lifelong process of learning that takes place outside of school as well as inside. Whilst not excusing the state from its responsibility to ensure quality education for all, there is a need for diverse forms of education ranging from formal to non-formal and informal interventions, provided by a variety of actors. Diverse provision not only allows the education to fit diverse circumstances and needs, but also meets the right of parents to choose the education that they deem most suitable for their daughter or son.<sup>11</sup> The state has a role here to provide the necessary policy framework including quality assurances and sometimes resources too, to guarantee that the education provided is of good quality and for all. Oxfam Novib can play a role in building bridges between non-formal and formal interventions and believes that important gains in relation to access and quality of overall education can then be achieved.<sup>12</sup> For example, Oxfam Novib's counterpart Tin Tua in Burkina Faso provides an innovative non-formal literacy program. Whilst this program was initially separate from state education, the government established a special fund and coordination mechanism to bring Tin Tua's work into the government plan on education, and to channel some resources to it.

When compared to state education, local civil society organisations such as Tin Tua have the advantage of knowing the local context and working in close collaboration

<sup>11</sup> See article 26.3 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights which states: 'Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.'

<sup>12</sup> The stereotypes are as follows: formal education is mainly uniform, regulated and compulsory provision by the state which is supposed to serve all, whereas non-formal education is diverse, mainly provided by civil society groups for specific marginalised groups including adults, and has an ad hoc or temporary status outside of compulsory schooling. However, many have argued that the dichotomy between non-formal and formal is no longer relevant in many contexts and is not helpful in strengthening the overall quality of education (Torres 2001). We believe that by building bridges between formal and non-formal provision, Oxfam Novib can better exploit the strengths of both approaches, for the good of quality education for all.

with the beneficiaries in a participatory and applied way. They also have more flexibility and freedom to innovate, and often gain useful and applicable lessons from their innovations in the short-term. This leads to approaches and methodologies that are very functional, when compared to the state's curriculum and approach which has its origin in the colonial time and which is often conservative and slow to change. However, to have a wider impact, the lessons learned from the non-formal sector need to be shared and to influence wider education provision. Oxfam Novib is in a position to build bridges between the formal and non-formal sectors by linking, through strategic funding, positive innovative experiences with national coalitions and platforms that can lobby the government for reform.

Although Oxfam has mainly focused on basic education, with an emphasis on primary education for girls, we support the full diversity of types of education, which are often mutually reinforcing. For example, enabling a woman to access post-primary education is likely to have a positive impact on her own children's access to education. For historic reasons, the majority of the analysis and strategies in this paper refer to Oxfam Novib's interventions with boys and girls of primary and secondary school age, but we believe that most of the points made also apply to other learners, such as adults and very young children.

Part of the innovative work we are planning is to do more to achieve a holistic view of lifelong learning. A building-block approach to lifelong learning would include pre-school education, parallel education for fathers and especially mothers in life skills and functional literacy, primary school provision with bridges to non-formal education, and extra-curricula community activities, including culture and sport. From those blocks we should make connections to vocational and secondary education including the community based extra-curricula activities on, for example, gender, non-violence, and HIV/AIDS. The next block would be opportunities for all in different types of tertiary and university education, again including extra-curricula and community activities. An important principle for us is to provide 'side-entrances', allowing children and adults who have missed the 'classical route' to find their way back to their right to lifelong learning, and to developing their own potential as human beings and as active citizens.

In conclusion, the state and civil society share a set of diverse responsibilities in guaranteeing the right to education, including providing, coordinating, monitoring, innovating and claiming good quality education. Who plays which role can differ according to context and time. This is especially so in conflict and post-conflict situations where local civil society and international and multilateral donors may temporarily take on the government's responsibility to ensure access to quality education for all. But whatever the situation, the education should follow the universal declaration of human rights, and be based on intrinsic respect for children, for girls as well as boys, in all their diversity.



### 3 Oxfam Novib's position on quality education

Despite the obvious rationale to take the quality of education seriously, international attention is highly focused on access to education, not quality. For example, MDG goals 2 and 3, on universal primary education and on gender equality, have been implemented as being about access: getting more children and particularly more girls into school. This focus on access to education has strongly overshadowed quality of education targets. One argument in favour of this is that raising enrolment rates is the first step, to be followed by improving the quality of education. We argue that both are needed, hand in hand. There is little point in getting children into schools where they learn very little; indeed, this may be counterproductive in terms of undermining parents' confidence in education, the expense of providing a poor education (including taking more years than should be necessary) for poor returns, and the opportunity cost of the productive work which they are not doing whilst in school. Another argument against focusing on quality is that compromises must be made if states are to guarantee the right to free primary education and to keep fees in secondary education to a minimum. This contradicts a rights-based approach: access to quality education is enshrined in international human rights and a trade-off between access and quality cannot be justified. Moreover, investing in the quality of education can pay off in terms of savings made. Take the case of North East Brazil where investment to improve the quality of education resulted in impressive reductions in the drop-out rate and improvements in the proportion of children promoted to the next class. Researchers followed the performance of students over a long time, and concluded that the savings made by reducing the number of years spent in the school system were often larger than the initial investment in improving quality (Hanushek et al 1996).

The case of Sri Lanka, as Box 3.1 outlines, shows how contextualized education strategies and other investments have led to high levels of enrolment and strong progress towards having equal numbers of girls and boys in primary school.<sup>13</sup> However, Sri Lanka still faces huge challenges, as is evident by the students' performance levels. Only about a third of children nationally reach mastery levels in literacy and maths, with the figure falling to around a quarter in the regions directly affected by conflict (UNICEF 2007). Clearly governments and donors need not only to keep up investment in education, but to attend to the need for quality, not only quantity.

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<sup>13</sup> Other developing countries which have made quick progress regarding universal access and gender parity are Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Senegal and South Africa (UNESCO 2005b). However, research by Oxfam Novib's counterparts and others on learners' performance has shown serious problems remaining with regard to the quality of education in these countries.

### Box 3.1 Sri Lanka's progress

#### What has been the strategy?

- Greater participatory consultation with civil society about national reforms on education.
- Contextualized education strategies such as multi-grade teaching, specially adapted curricula, and enhancement of teacher's career prospects.

#### What are the outcomes?

- The primary school enrollment rate was over 98% in 2003/2004, with around 94 girls for every 100 boys.
- Grade repetition and dropout have declined rapidly and the promotion rate stood at 98.4% in 2001.
- The pupil: teacher ratio fell from 24:1 to 22:1 between 1992 and 1999.
- Exclusion of Tamil children in the country's tea plantation area is being addressed.

#### On-going challenges

- Only 62% of teachers are properly trained.
- There is a shortfall of about 5,000 teachers in the North and East of the country.
- Low performance levels achieved by the majority of students.
- There are concentrations of children who are not enrolled, particularly young children in the slum areas of Columbo, and in the districts of Jaffna, Galle and Matara districts.

## 3.1 Defining quality of education

Our position, then, is that access and quality should not be separated: if rights are to be met, and if education is to have its transformative effect on individuals, communities and economies, then it needs to be quality education. We are not alone in thinking that the quality of education has been neglected; for example, a recent evaluation of the World Bank's interventions on primary education recommended a stronger focus on the quality of the education and on learning outcomes (World Bank 2006). But what does 'quality education' mean?

In recent years both UNESCO and UNICEF have developed frameworks for understanding the quality of education in any particular setting (UNESCO 2005a:36, UNICEF 2000:30). Each model features four basic dimensions which are interdependent, influencing each other in ways that are sometimes unforeseeable:

- a physical and psycho-social *characteristics of the learners*;
- b *enabling inputs*, categorised by teachers and their teaching, school materials including curricula, and educational systems including schools and administrative bodies;
- c the *context* or environment; and
- d *outcomes* in the form of basic literacy, numeracy and all creative, emotional and life skills that enable learners to flourish and participate in society.

To a great extent, Oxfam Novib follows this learner-centred, systemic, contextualized and outcome-oriented understanding of quality education. However, in distinction to the mainstream understanding of quality education, we emphasise that it is a process of improving cognitive and skills development in individuals *permeated with an overriding purpose of achieving equity and justice*. Or, to turn it round the other

way, as we in Oxfam want to achieve equity and justice<sup>14</sup> we should promote quality education which focuses on individual and collective empowerment leading to societal transformation. Equity and justice should be pursued in education processes at all levels. This means examining the whole education system – teachers and student-teacher relations, curricula and pedagogic methodologies, and management – and orientating all aspects to empowerment and creating positive change to meet the basic human rights of all.

Note that, whilst resources are important, our focus on furthering equity and justice through quality education is quite different from advocacy merely for more investment in education. Note also that, with regard to equity in relation to education, we mean more than the dominant concepts around gender parity and equality goals as reflected in the MDG agenda.<sup>15</sup> We believe that the rights and entitlements to a quality education for all girls and boys should be ensured, including children from indigenous groups, those from rural or urban communities, working children, children affected by HIV and AIDS, and those who are in any other way marginalised or excluded. Without equity, justice in education cannot be done.

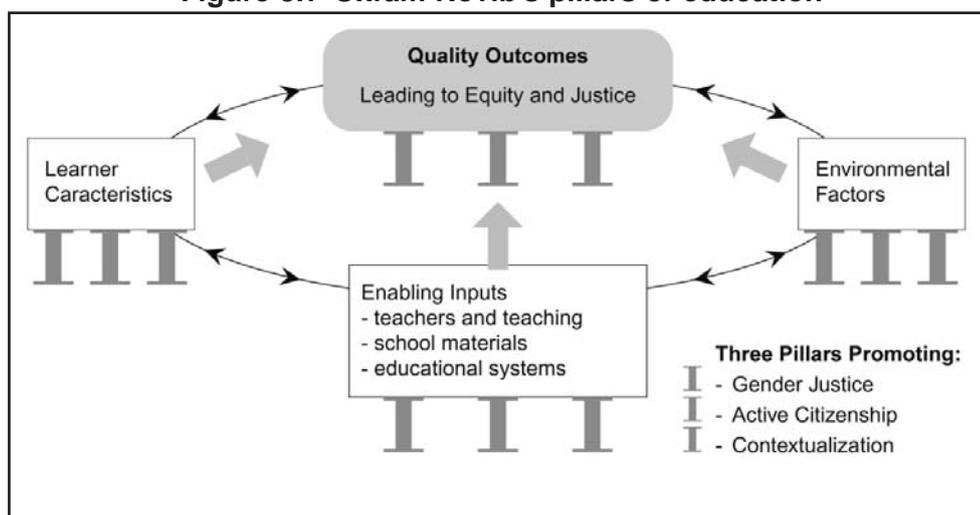
### 3.2 Three principles to achieve quality education

To help focus what we mean by quality education leading to greater equity and justice, we have identified three basic principles, supporting each of the four dimensions listed above. As Figure 3.1 shows, we can think of them as pillars which must be strong enough to carry the dimensions. The principles are:

- to practice gender-just education;
- to promote active citizenship; and
- to make sure education is contextualized.

Each of these principles or pillars is significant, as without any one of them we cannot, to use Paulo Freire's terminology, produce quality education which can liberate the most disadvantaged.

**Figure 3.1 Oxfam Novib's pillars of education**



<sup>14</sup> Oxfam International's commitment to Equity and Justice is reflected in its two operational plans 'Towards Global Equity' and 'Demanding Justice' covering the period 2001- 2012 (Oxfam International 2000 and 2006).

<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of the different concepts around gender parity, equity and equality see Aikman S and Unterhalter E 2005.

*Practicing gender-just education:* gender justice is about undoing injustices or the violations of rights that have their cause in gender inequality or inequity.<sup>16</sup> Getting all girls into school as well as boys is only part of the challenge; a gender-just education also questions beliefs and values about boys and girls, men and women and their roles and diverse identities in society, in order to bring equity and justice to all people. For example, one of our counterparts, the Malian organization IEP, includes in its curriculum many opportunities for teachers and students to reflect on the rights of boys and girls in their society. By examining these relationships and considering how to make changes, the education process can mindfully contribute to reducing the human rights violations against women and girls. In general, a quality education which attends to the principle of a gender-just education will promote female empowerment and a different concept of manhood.

Of course, women's and girls' claims for equal rights are connected to achieving human rights for all. Take the example of COBET in Tanzania, an Oxfam GB partner, which aims to guarantee quality secondary education for Masai girls by providing quality, intercultural education suited to the needs of Masai girls. Their efforts have resulted in more support from the Masai community for educating girls, higher proportions of girls completing secondary, vocational and tertiary education, and subsequently a greater involvement of these female graduates in securing the political and social well being of their communities. Just as there are no human rights without women's rights, there are no women's rights without indigenous people's rights, the rights of the disabled, of people of color, and of lesbians and gays.

*Promoting active citizenship:* we believe that education of good quality should empower learners to be full and active citizens, exercising their right to political participation, both individually and collectively. We know that the collective action of citizens can do much to achieve more equity and social justice, as has been shown by the trade union movement and more recently by civil society mobilization such as GCAP and consumer movements. Quality education which attends to the principle of active citizenship builds on people's diverse identities, allowing them to participate and develop to their fullest individual and collective potential. Democracy and quality education may reinforce each other: democratic governments may be more likely to provide quality education for all than autocratic governments, and quality education helps build democracy, as it links positively to increased preference for democracy,<sup>17</sup> and students' participation in school and community governance link to more positive attitudes, beliefs and behavior concerning active citizenship (Davies 2005). The practices of IEP and of other Oxfam Novib counterparts also illustrate the positive link between a quality education and active citizenship.<sup>18</sup>

*Ensuring education is contextualized* if education is to be of good quality, and centred on the achievement of justice and equality of human rights, it needs to be tailored to local realities. This means both making education responsive to the diverse needs of girls and boys in different situations, including those who are marginalised, and accountable to parents, communities and taxpayers – the Acceptability and Adaptability from Tomasevski's definition of the four A's. Therefore it is crucial that

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed definition of Gender Justice, including concepts of diversity and intersectionality, see Oxfam Novib's Position Paper on Gender Justice (Oxfam Novib 2007).

<sup>17</sup> See Stasavage D (2005) and Evans G and Rose P (2006) for more detailed analyses on the link between democracy and education in Africa.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Pukllasunchis Association and Formabiap – Inter-ethnic Association of Development of the Peruvian Tropical Forest in Peru, which builds indigenous leadership through quality, intercultural and bilingual education. The work of the Ecumenical Popular Education Programme in the Middle East and the Cultural Association of Social and Educational Self Promotion (ACAPES) in Senegal also shows how quality education can make use of and promote public engagement – see [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org).

learners, teachers and communities participate in the development of interventions aimed at ensuring a contextualized education. In addition to the rights-based reasons for adapting education in order to make it accessible to all, there is ample evidence that education which is relevant for the learner and their community leads to a better performance from the learner and greater support for education from the community. For example in Bolivia 24% of students following the Intercultural and Bilingual Education curriculum repeat an academic year, compared to 48% of students in rural primary schools following the standard curriculum (Albo 2006).

### **Box 3.2 Working on quality education: the case of IEP in Mali**

#### **The situation in Mali**

Mali faces serious challenges in education: the enrolment rate is only 46%, there is one teacher for every 57 pupils, one out of every three girls drops out of school, and only half of boys and girls continue education after primary school. The government of Mali developed a 10 year strategic plan, PRODEC, which aims to raise enrolment to 75% by 2008 and to significantly improve the quality of education. PRODEC decentralizes education and provides opportunities for civil society actors to develop innovative strategies to improve the quality of education and to organize the participation of parents, teachers and learners in the education system.

#### **IEP's response**

IEP was founded in 1993 by a group of educationalists aspiring to reform the education system in Mali, providing for alternative thinking and strategy development in popular education. Through research, development and piloting of alternative education methods, IEP has developed into a centre of reference on quality education in Mali. Its achievements include:

- Development of the CIWARA curriculum (literally translated in the work as a lion and symbolizing courage, wisdom and progress) and CIWARA teaching pedagogy, a competency-based, bilingual approach to learning that is founded on Malian cultural values and which prepares youth for active citizenship.
- Development of training modules for community school teachers based on the CIWARA approach (e.g. including extensive training on gender and HIV/AIDS).
- Formation of community based organizations (e.g. PTAs) to ensure citizens' participation in the planning, management and monitoring of the performance of the community schools.
- Continuous political lobby and public campaigning focusing on the specific needs of girls, and claiming the rights of all girls and boys to a quality education.

#### **What have been the results?**

- Learners' performance has improved in the 16 community schools that have tested the CIWARA curriculum and teaching methodology.
- The CIWARA curriculum has been recognized by state and local education authorities as an appropriate method to implement the objectives of the PRODEC and it has supplemented and enriched the official curriculum.
- 100 teachers per year (60% female) have been trained in working with the CIWARA approach, and formal teacher training centers have solicited IEP's assistance to reform and strengthen the present teacher training curriculum and pedagogy.
- 50 PTAs have actively monitored teacher and school performance
- In all communities where IEP works women have taken the lead in monitoring enrolment of and performance by girls by establishing special commissions.

There are however tensions between contextualizing education and taking a rights-based approach, because wherever human rights are abused an education promoting those rights will inevitably clash with vested interests and cultural attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Oxfam Novib strongly believes that using a rights-based approach means taking a stand to confront norms and structures which constrain the basic rights of human beings in all their diversity. For example, in settings where it is 'culturally unacceptable' to talk to young people about sexual health, organizations such as IEP providing quality education do not contextualize to that restriction, as it denies young people their right to information and free choice. Instead they adapt proactively to the context with strategies that support girls and boys in Mali to access information, to critically analyse current norms, and to take action to ensure a respect for their rights.

Box 3.2 features the work of IEP, which illustrates how the three pillars of gender-just work which promotes active citizenship through contextualized education can be drawn together in an approach which uses all of the strategies outlined in this section.

### **3.3 Monitoring quality education**

National governments and international agencies mainly monitor progress with easy-to-gather indicators concerning access to education, which tends to skew interventions towards a focus on increasing enrolment. As we have already noted, the quality of education receives less attention, perhaps partly because, with its multidimensional effects, it is harder to measure. Indicators based on literacy and numeric ability are useful in showing the impact of education on cognitive development, but these need to be disaggregated according to learners' ethnic, linguistic, social and economic background and gender if we are to attend to equity in quality education provision (GCE 2002). Indicators, formulated at learners' level, should also track the quality of the training and on the job support which teachers receive and assess their performance. Furthermore, we need to develop new indicators to track, for example, the effect of education on promoting active citizenship, or how teachers are adopting a lifelong learning perspective. In the coming years Oxfam Novib will invest in developing such indicators to measure outcomes and processes in its own monitoring systems. We will also urge international donors and national governments to invest in better monitoring systems, and to make these more transparent and accountable to communities and the diverse needs within them.

## 4 Implications for Oxfam Novib's work to promote quality education

What does our present position taking mean for Oxfam Novib, and for other agencies following a rights-based approach? How might our understanding of a quality education fit in with the innovative work on education which Oxfam Novib committed itself to in its Business Plan 2007-2010. That document states, with regard to the innovation on education, that

*Oxfam Novib will develop a concept for 'safe, democratic and inclusive education'. In the process it will build bridges between formal and non-formal education interventions. The aim is to structurally change the ways boys and girls relate to each other, strengthen the prevention of (sexual) violence and HIV/AIDS and promote active citizenship (Oxfam Novib 2006b).*

This section outlines some relevant strategies to work towards quality education based on the three pillars described in Section 3. We focus on the dimension of enabling inputs: teachers and teaching, school materials, and education systems. This is not because the other dimensions of learner characteristics and environmental factors are unimportant, but because Oxfam Novib considers itself and its counterparts to be most experienced in, and suited to, influencing the enabling inputs. Of course, the different dimensions of quality education overlap in any case; devising strategies to enhance community participation in the management of schools inevitably also involves dealing with the environmental factors that determine community members' attitudes towards education and their disposition to participate.

### 4.1 Supporting teachers to be agents of change

A strong teaching force, including capable ministry officials, inspectors and teacher trainers, is a crucial building block towards achieving quality basic education for all. Indeed, research has shown that well-trained and supported teachers are a critical success factor in raising school achievements, more important than class sizes or the availability of learning materials (O'Sullivan 2006). The shortage of well qualified teachers is one of the main reasons for the current crisis in the quality of education, a shortage which is exacerbated by the effects of HIV/AIDS on staff in the education sector and the need for more teachers as enrolment rates rise.<sup>19</sup> Despite poor conditions including substandard training, inadequate facilities and low pay, there are many teachers around the world who are dynamic and dedicated, able to motivate children to learn and to make that learning interesting, engaging and useful. It is vital that we learn from them, and adapt and use effective training mechanisms and ways of supporting teachers from both formal and non-formal settings to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies.

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO (2006) estimates that 18 million teachers will be needed in the next decade to meet Universal Primary Education goals. The new teachers are needed to fill new posts and to replace teachers leaving existing posts.

Here we suggest two potential areas for action by Oxfam Novib and its counterparts to help teachers become agents of change, delivering a contextualized quality education directed at active citizenship and gender justice.

#### **4.2.1 Supporting teachers to become facilitators of individual and communal learning**

Educationalists such as Paulo Freire have shown the power of approaching learners, whether adults or children, as promoters of their own learning in order to promote active citizenship and more just relationships between men and women, the poor and the rich. Better training for teachers can enable them to develop facilitators' skills so as to move from pure instruction to interactive, participatory pedagogies. Participatory styles of learning are highly beneficial for students – who typically become more engaged with topics and develop greater skills as a result – and are also generally more motivating for teachers themselves. Furthermore, the participatory style has greater potential for transformation, as students are asked to consider issues and answer questions, rather than only to remember facts.

In addition to helping teachers to adopt a different style of teaching, we should also support them to develop and use new curricula. For example, where new modules are introduced as part of the development of rights-based and gender sensitive curricula, teachers will benefit from in-service training, exchanges, and teachers guides to help them use the materials effectively. This is particularly crucial in helping teachers to themselves adopt gender-just values; they need to understand and believe in what the curriculum sets out for them to teach. A perfect module on sexual health will be of little benefit to students if teachers refuse to use it, lack the skills to use it well, or negatively adapt it to fit their own beliefs about male and female roles in relationships.

Participatory learning needs a safe classroom and school environment for girls and boys. Teachers can set an example by promoting respect for diversity, and making a clear stance against discriminatory behavior, bullying and sexual harassment in and outside the classroom. Developing Codes of Conduct with the participation of students, parents and teachers is one strategy to support the creation of a safe school environment.

Box 4.1 outlines the work of our counterpart Education Initiative for Water (EIW) in China, which invested in enabling teachers to become facilitators of learning. Note that because EIW focused on education for sustainable development and environmental justice, rather than focusing on cognitive skills alone, its work had substantially more impact on the students, teachers and communities involved. Our counterpart ACAPES in Senegal has invested in training teachers from local communities, and then supported them to work outside of the classrooms as mediators between parents and out of school youth, with very positive effects on enrolment and the quality of education. There is also value in supporting teachers to work with communities, for example, by inviting parents and other community members including women with non-formal leadership roles into schools to share their knowledge, to support students in remedial teaching, or to contribute to extra-curricular activities.

### **Box 4.1 Education for sustainable development the case of EIW – Environmental education focusing on water in Beijing**

#### **The situation**

On the one hand, an education system characterized by the mode that 'teachers talk and students listen', using textbooks which are not developed in the region, and so lacking in relevance to the lives of the pupils and teachers. On the other hand, the existence of local environmental issues which require citizen action if they are to be tackled. The Education Initiative for Water (EIW) aims to address both these issues by building the capacity of teachers and students to develop an ethic of responsibility towards the environment through community-based projects. It is part of WWF China's Environmental Educators' Initiative, and works with students from eight primary and middle schools in Beijing with a focus on water because water management is an important issue in the city. The approach is one of student-centered, active learning through real world problem-solving and community service.

#### **How it was done**

Teacher training orientated teachers to ways in which they could encourage their students to take the initiative to care for their physical and social environment.

Student-centered learning was exhilarating for the children. Stressing a "real world" approach, students observed their environment, rediscovered some of the history and traditions of the area, identified problems, and took actions towards solving those problems. These actions included taking measurements, conducting interviews, and sharing their findings through community education.

Developing school-based curricula: The project organized a study tour to Hong Kong for teachers to meet colleagues involved in similar initiatives, and trained the teachers in how to develop a school-based curriculum based on their project activities.

#### **The effects**

##### *For students*

- Abilities which are not highlighted by traditional teaching methods were revealed and performance improved.
- They became more active, responsive and articulate, and with a better understanding of the connectivity between different subjects.
- They gained greater responsibility through student-student mentoring and the chance to have an authoritative voice in the community.
- Through their hands-on experiences, their awareness of environmental and social issues has increased, as has their interest in responding to those issues.

##### *For teachers*

- Acquired new or improved teaching skills, including interdisciplinary teaching techniques.
- Increased job satisfaction and greater enjoyment of teaching.
- Gained a better relationship with their students, looking at learning from the student's rather than teacher's perspective.

##### *For the environment and local communities*

- Most schools have run school and/or community campaigns about the need to conserve and manage the use of resources, and have developed codes of practice for water use.
- The students themselves are creating and making public baseline data on the state of the watershed in Beijing.
- Ya'er Hutong School students successfully campaigned for the relocation of a soy sauce factory, which was causing water pollution.
- Ya'er Hutong School also negotiated a code of conduct on emissions with businesses near to a popular lakeside recreational area, and is now monitoring its implementation.
- A group of 15 school students has devised a possible biological management solution for an algae-infested lake, as an alternative to chemical treatment.

### 4.1.2 Supporting female teachers

Many countries have sought to recruit more female teachers. There is a clear link in promoting girls education, hiring female teachers and improving the overall quality of education. This is especially so when strategies to promote girls education are founded on a respect for diversity, not only with regard to gender, but also to sexual orientation, ethnicity and faith.<sup>20</sup> With regard to gender, diversity policies for teachers include: quotas and positive discrimination in favour of female applicants; lower qualification requirements coupled with in-service training for female teachers; providing secure housing for female teachers in remote areas; and the formulation and implementation of sexual harassment policies. Unsurprisingly, experience shows that the morale, motivation and retention of teachers in general is positively linked to: improving teachers' professional status; promoting career development; teachers' participation in decision making; implementing codes of conduct; and tackling corruption. Significantly, research shows that improving the professional status and morale of female teachers has a direct impact on quality education and the way that women are valued in communities, thereby contributing directly and indirectly to more gender justice.

An example of how female teachers can contribute to improving quality in education is shown by one of our counterparts in India, Pratham.<sup>21</sup> Their *Balshakhi* in-school program in Mumbai provides mentoring support to children in order to improve educational levels and reduce drop-out rates at primary level in government schools. Each *Balshakhi* (meaning 'child's friend') is a young female volunteer from the community who is trained to act as a teacher and mentor for in-school children who need learning support. The close guidance that the *Balshakhi* provides improves the motivation and the performance of the children. At the same time the work socially empowers the *Balshakhi* through improving her status within the community and giving her more confidence. The *Balshakhi* are paid a small amount for their work; some also go on to provide private tuition within their communities, or progress to formal teacher training. The program therefore benefits children who are struggling in school, the young women who become *Balshakhi*, and provides a positive role model for girls both in and out of school.

## 4.2 Advocating for and developing transformative curricula

The content of what is taught at school is unavoidably a political issue. For example, the choice of language, the way history is narrated, or how geographical borders are shown are highly sensitive issues with significant consequences, especially in (post)-conflict situations or settings where ethnic minorities are being structurally marginalized.

Although many countries have revised their curricula following the colonial era, they have not produced curricula which are gender sensitive and rights-based, and which promote active citizenship and societal change. For example, Oxfam Novib counterpart IEP reviewed 18 textbooks and analyzed the attitudes towards change and gender justice among stakeholders involved in education in Mali. They found that the textbooks and the attitudes of teachers, parents, and policy makers reinforce the gender inequalities present in Malian society. Textbooks featured women in traditional

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<sup>20</sup> Education International ([www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org)) documents how teachers and learners are discriminated against due to lack of respect for diversity: see for example, *The Rights of Lesbian and Gay Teachers and Education Personnel, triennial report 2004-2007* and *The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Education, triennial report 2004-2007*, both presented at Education International's Berlin Congress 2007.

<sup>21</sup> See Pratham's website [www.pratham.org](http://www.pratham.org) and [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org)



roles, education staff used sexist language, and the curriculum did not take up opportunities to address issues around gender (in)equality (Aikman and Unterhalter 2005).

Oxfam Novib advocates that nations should choose to develop a transformative curriculum, and so take up the opportunity to gear their development toward a more just and inclusive society. To do so, countries should develop new curricula or new modules in close consultation with all representatives of civil society, especially women's groups and ethnic minorities, using a framework of universally agreed rights and duties. Of course, the process is not an easy one, as vested interests will try to obstruct education development which challenges the current status quo. An example of this is the action of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, which persuaded the government not to include a new sexual education module in the official curriculum. Continuous pressure from civil society organizations led, after two years, to the module being included.

The goal of curriculum development should be to work towards school materials that not only educate pupils, but also seek to transform present inequalities by reconfiguring the roles, status and opportunities for women and girls, men and boys. Here we suggest two specific areas for action.

#### **4.2.1 Developing contextualized curricula that stimulate problem-solving**

For education to be powerful in the process of seeking equity and justice, it needs to be something which learners actively do, rather than something which is done to them. An example of contextualized education using active participation is the practice of Oxfam Novib counterpart EPEP, working in Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. EPEP bases its approach to quality education on a Freirian, communitarian participatory approach.<sup>22</sup> It seeks to promote education as a democratic and critical process which allows for the acquisition of knowledge but also values the knowledge of marginalized individuals and communities, through which learners can change their life status for the better. EPEP focuses on women, and has developed a teaching methodology, *Pedagogie du Text*, whereby participants learn to read and write by creating their own texts, based on their own lives. The EPEP facilitator uses the texts to engage groups of women in critical reflection on their lives in relation to universal human rights, and the actions they can take to claim their rights. We have already presented, in Box 4.1, EIW's work with school children to develop a curriculum from a problem-solving approach focused on environmental issues. The problem-solving strategy for engaging learners can also be applied to interpersonal issues, for example, improving life skills by discovering how to resolve conflict in non-violent ways.

One simple but powerful way in which curricula exclude potential learners, and undermine enrolled learners' achievements, is by using a language which is not their first language or mother tongue. Research has overwhelmingly shown that children who begin learning in their first language are more likely to succeed academically and are better able to learn other languages.<sup>23</sup> The benefits of education programs that build on learners' strengths, and especially the languages in which they communicate best, include higher self-esteem, better communication skills and greater creativity. Significantly, these benefits tend to be greater among girls compared to boys. Education in students' mother tongue also facilitates greater involvement of parents and the community in schools and in educational policy development.

In addition to the use of appropriate languages,<sup>24</sup> a contextualized curriculum should positively reinforce the ethnic identity of male and female pupils. The curriculum should ideally be delivered by trained teachers from local communities, and complemented by libraries with reading materials in local languages, cultural activities, and indigenous cultural centers. This is particularly significant for marginalized indigenous groups, if education is to promote their active citizenship and so contribute to their struggle for democracy, justice and self-determination.

#### **4.2.2 Advocacy for and development of comprehensive sexuality education that empowers girls and boys**

We know that unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, gender based violence and sexual transmitted infections including HIV are far too prevalent in the lives of adolescents and youth. The roots of these problems are denial of rights; too many young men and women lack information and access to good quality services, and the core issue of power imbalance leaves many girls and women with limited control over their sexual and reproductive lives.

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<sup>22</sup> Another successful approach inspired by Paulo Freire's thinking is ActionAid's REFLECT methodology, which is being used by over 350 organizations in 60 countries: see [www.actionaid.org.uk](http://www.actionaid.org.uk)

<sup>23</sup> For much more on children's right to learn in their own languages see *id21 insights education 5*, September 2006, available in English, French and Spanish from [www.id21.org/insights](http://www.id21.org/insights).

<sup>24</sup> As indigenous peoples commonly use more than one language and different ethnic minorities live together, a multi-lingual and intercultural education may be necessary, developed out of a respect for diversity and the complex relationship between ethnic identity and language.

The sexual and reproductive health rights of young men and women are enshrined in international human rights conventions, and governments have committed themselves time and again to ensure those rights by integrating comprehensive sexuality education in their national curricula. However, many have not made good those commitments; a 2001 study of 107 countries found that 44 did not include education about HIV and AIDS in their school curricula (UNFPA 2003). Even among those nations which have developed curricula that include topics on sexuality and/or AIDS education, there are problems. First, the content tends to be basic information provision alone, without any opportunity for reflection, and second, teachers are not prepared or trained to engage with their students in an open way about issues which many consider taboo. The result is that sexuality education tends to focus on technical aspects alone: providing information which is often incomplete (for example, focusing on abstinence only) and which although theoretically useful, may be unusable and anxiety-inducing if girls and boys are not able to relate to it and adapt it to their own lives. For example, information alone about the need to use condoms to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections can be disempowering in settings where girls and young women do not have the power to expect their sexual partners to use a condom.

A comprehensive sexuality education should give learners a positive view of sexuality, provide them with information and skills about taking care of their sexual health, and help them to acquire skills to make decisions now and in the future. As such, Oxfam Novib supports the development of curricula, and accompanying training for teachers, which provide girls and boys with sexual health information and the opportunity to explore attitudes, to question misconceptions, to understand gender injustice, and to develop personal skills. Openness about sexuality and the inclusion of a comprehensive sexuality education is an important component of a quality education directed at gender justice and active citizenship.

However, a major obstacle in developing transformative sexuality education is the widely held belief that discussing sexuality with young people encourages them to have sex; for example, that telling them about how to use condoms gives permission for sex outside of marriage, and leads to young people having sex from an earlier age and with more partners. However, a wide body of evidence shows the contrary; young people who receive comprehensive sexuality education are more likely to delay initiating sex and to use protection when they do have sex, so maintaining better sexual health, compared to youth who receive abstinence-only programs (WPF 2006).

One Oxfam Novib counterpart linking gender empowerment and sexual and reproductive health rights is Girls Power Initiative (GPI) in Nigeria. They do sexual and reproductive health education in schools, and also engage young people, their parents and other community members in out of school activities such as community discussion groups, parent-daughter fora and girl-led radio and television programs. Crucially, they involve girls and boys in developing and adjusting the modules on sexuality in their Girl's Empowering Program, and embed their sexual and reproductive health education work in a broader life skills curriculum. This life skills work facilitates learning in and out of school, supporting adolescents and communities to relate to each other, to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way and to make healthy choices in life.

### **4.3 Promoting accountable and transparent education systems**

In most developing countries a process of decentralization of the provision and control of education services is taking place. The process is not without problems: the risk of overburdening the already scarce resources of local authorities and communities; discrepancies in the quality of education between regions; and a lack of transparency and accountability in the channeling of funds to the local level. However, positive effects on the quality of education as a result of decentralization are also evident, particularly when the starting point is that of making schools autonomous. The practice of 'school-based management' or 'school self-governance' is based on evidence that the relationships between the different actors (head teacher, the teachers and the community) and the school's own involvement in defining and evaluating its improvement have a profound impact on the quality of education (de Grauwe 2005). By bringing the management, the (quality) control and the development of educational programs closer to learners and the communities they live in through actively soliciting their input and involvement, local education authorities and schools are able to adapt the education they provide more to local needs. This includes the use of local languages along with other strategies such as adapting school content and hours to local agricultural realities, as implemented by Bangladeshi organization BRAC. Another Oxfam Novib counterpart in Bangladesh, CAMPE, has found that having a greater voice for all stakeholders in the management of schools is particularly crucial in the improvement of the quality of education.

#### **4.3.1 Promoting community participation in the management of schools and education systems**

School based management has the potential to create greater community participation, as demonstrated by ACAPES in Senegal. ACAPES recognizes that quality education is a wider process than just what takes place in the classroom, and so has connected with the families, neighborhoods and villages that surround the teachers and students. Pupils in ACAPES schools do practical terms in their neighborhood (for example, on non violence, HIV/AIDS, women's rights) and once a year, during the summer holidays, there are exchanges between schools in rural and urban areas. During these camps pupils work on one of the visited community's social projects, such as water and sanitation, or female leadership. The communities involved have focal points, which have lead to new instances of organization at a bigger scale with General Assemblies created at a regional level.

Other initiatives among Oxfam Novib's counterparts are Bodh in India,<sup>25</sup> with its decentralization and capacity building processes, the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) of Lokmitra in India,<sup>26</sup> and the Association Tin Tua<sup>27</sup> in Burkina Faso which works with the community councils that manage education at a local level. All these projects are built on processes of community participation which lock-in processes of transparent decision-making which stimulate accountability and reduce the danger of corruption. At the same time the creation or spontaneous development of these representative bodies in itself fosters active citizenship and build civil society.

We should note, however, that the participation of teachers, parents, learners and community members in education decision-making is crucial for raising quality, but does not guarantee that it will be directed at active citizenship and more gender justice. Research in community schools in Africa found that community participation

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<sup>25</sup> See [www.bodh.org/](http://www.bodh.org/) and [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org)

<sup>26</sup> See [www.srtt.org/prog-edu-sch-lokmitra.html](http://www.srtt.org/prog-edu-sch-lokmitra.html) and [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org)

<sup>27</sup> See [www.tintua.org/presentation.htm](http://www.tintua.org/presentation.htm)

in the management of schools was rather mechanical, focusing more on procedural matters than on collaboration in the pedagogical sphere. Common notions as to what schools should be about – teaching basic literacy and numeric skills – were not questioned (Hoppers 2005). We therefore believe that capacity building support to local authorities and school management bodies should focus not only on technical aspects, such as financial management, but also stimulate critical reflection about the need for a contextualized quality education directed at gender justice and active citizenship.

#### **4.3.2 Promoting female leadership in schools**

One critical success factor to improve the quality of education through education systems is having transformative leaders in the right places. It is therefore essential to build the capacities of local authorities and school management, and to provide continuous support to them. Experience shows that in general female head teachers are more responsive to the needs of girls, more likely to promote safer learning environments for girls and boys, and liable to stimulate more community involvement in school, especially of mothers (Aikman & Unterhalter 2005). In addition, female head teachers provide a role model for girls and boys, parents and communities, demonstrating that women can take on leadership roles traditionally attributed to men. Oxfam Novib counterparts may be in position to support female head teachers and transformative male head teachers, or, as in the case of the Zimbabwean organization Girl Child Network (GCN),<sup>28</sup> to foster leadership from among female pupils and female teachers. GCN has promoted the creation of 350 school clubs for girls in formal post primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The objective of these clubs is for girls to learn about their rights, express their fears, and gain confidence to speak out when their rights have been violated, particularly in cases of sexual violence at school and within their families. The clubs empower girls to fight and resist harmful cultural practices that hinder their development (such as forced marriage, virginity testing and sex initiation), to build leadership skills, and they offer career guidance. Critical to the success of the clubs is that they are managed by the girls themselves, set up in close co-ordination with the community and school and coordinated by female teachers. Evaluations have shown that a considerable proportion of clubs' members finish secondary education and some continue studying in university. Considering the impact which secondary and tertiary education have on women's empowerment, income and health, we are confident that GCN's work contributes to a more gender just and inclusive world.

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<sup>28</sup> See also [www.girlchildnetwork.net](http://www.girlchildnetwork.net) or [www.oxfamkic.org](http://www.oxfamkic.org)



## 5 Summary and conclusions

This paper has set out Oxfam Novib's position on the importance of quality of education. It has argued that the current focus of resources on only improving enrolment levels is unacceptable, and that the goal of achieving access for all and quality education should go hand in hand, in order to meet basic rights.

We have also argued that for education to enable other rights and to transform societies it is essential that the process is permeated with an overriding purpose of pursuing greater equity and justice. Education is not just about cognitive skills. To focus education processes on creating individual and collective empowerment to create equity and justice, we have proposed three principles which should guide us: that the education work should be gender-just, promote active citizenship, and be contextualized to local needs.

The practical strategies we have suggested, based on the positive experiences of our counterparts, and stemming from these three principles, are:

- Supporting teachers to be agents of change, enabling them to become facilitators of learning;
- Supporting female teachers and female leadership;
- Advocating for and developing transformative curricula which are contextualized and stimulate problem-solving, including comprehensive and empowering sexuality education;
- Promoting accountable and transparent education systems through community participation in the management of schools and education systems.

What are the next steps for Oxfam Novib?

- 1 Following a rights-based approach, we will invest in quality education in our own work, and that of our counterparts. To strengthen our educational programming, we will focus on work which is based on the three principles, and which enables teachers to become agents of change, which generates transformative curricula, and results in accountable and transparent education systems.
- 2 As part of our innovation work on education will intend to develop a more holistic approach to education through the concept of lifelong learning. Instead of understanding education as a discrete activity which only takes place in school among children of school going age, this approach also embraces pre-school children and adults, and includes community activities, non-formal and formal education.
- 3 We will also continue to hold states and donors to account through our involvement in campaigns such as the Global Campaign for Education. They have a duty to prioritize quality education, in line with Education for All goals.
- 4 We recognize that indicators for measuring progress towards quality education, as defined in this paper, are underdeveloped. We therefore commit ourselves, in cooperation with other actors, to do more work on measuring the outcomes and impacts of quality education.

- 5 We will also continue our investment in learning from good, bad and new practices in quality education through the KIC project, to ensure that innovations on improving education quality are built on a shared understanding of past experience.

We hope that this paper has been stimulating, and that it will be part of a process of focusing our efforts and investments in education to interventions which make a greater contribution to achieving justice and equity. As we and our counterparts innovate, experience and learn more, so we intend to refine our ideas and share more lessons on the quest for not merely education, but *quality* education.

**Promises to Children  
Should Never be Broken**  
Nelson Mandela, 2006

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