THE RIGHT TO LEARN

Community participation in improving learning

Save the Children

Cover photo: Each Saturday, Malati reads stories, draws pictures and learns new songs and words at a Save the Children-supported reading camp in her village in Nepal.

Sanjana Shrestha/Save the Children

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Save the Children is the leading independent organization for children in need, with programs in 120 countries, including the United States. We aim to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives by improving their health, education and economic opportunities. In times of acute crisis, we mobilize rapid assistance to help children recover from the effects of war, conflict and natural disasters.

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Nosheen, 10, studying at a Save the Children-supported primary school in Pakistan.

Photo: Fauzan Ljaxah/Save the Children

Hatiabo Haji Somir Uddin Community School, Gazipur District, Bangladesh. Proteeva Project: Pre-primary school student Kawser uses a bottle and funnel to pour water during an exercise designed to promote numeracy.

Photo: Jeff Holt/Save the Children

FOREWORD

Consider that, in some African countries, as many as 40 percent of young adults are illiterate even though they have completed five years of schooling. Yet this stark reality is not confined to a few countries, or even to just one continent. During my recent work with the United Nations High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, I observed there was a global crisis of too many poor quality schools and increasingly alarming trends in learning. A course correction is needed, which should be reflected in improved national education policy as well as the set of goals to follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire in 2015.

The leadership of governments is critical to improving the quality of education. To complement and enhance this, we must also harness the power and demand for improved education from parents, students, and community leaders around the world. Many communities remain dissatisfied with their local schools and are disappointed with the poor learning outcomes of their children. Many parents move their children into private schools at the first opportunity. But we ignore the voices of those who struggle with these issues daily at our peril. Without a significant change in the accountability of governments and schools to parents and communities, we will fail to achieve the transformational force of education in the places where it is most needed.

In my 30 years of work in development policy, I have observed the transformative power of education. A good education generates multiplier effects for national development. It provides a skilled workforce needed for economic growth and creates more informed civil society which can enrich national debates. However, to yield sustained benefits at the national level we must ensure that education is about learning outcomes, not just years of schooling. If children lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, they will not be able to benefit from further learning in their teen years and then prosper as adults. If youth are not able to develop the necessary practical and technical skills, then the impact of such an education system on economic growth will be very limited. With Africa's growing youth population, the continent can experience a demographic dividend if we are able to improve the learning outcomes of our children.

Through our endeavors to improve learning, our focus must also be on reducing the educational inequality that remains unacceptably high in countries around the world. While girls' access to schooling has improved, many disparities persist behind the national averages. There is a gender divide: young girls are less likely to learn than young boys. There is a rural-urban divide: rural populations are less likely to learn than urban populations. And there is a wealth divide: the poor are less likely to learn than the wealthy. If we are to prevent today's inequalities in education from becoming tomorrow's inequalities of income, wealth, and power, then every child must have the opportunity to learn.

It is clear that we need a paradigm shift in education, and the way forward is to improve learning outcomes by strengthening accountability of governments and schools to parents and communities. We also need to focus on equitable learning, ensuring that the poorest and most disadvantaged children are not excluded, and that all children are both in school and learning. We need to listen to the voices of the parents, communities, and civil society organizations, who struggle with these issues daily.

To achieve this paradigm shift in education, action and change for greater accountability over learning outcomes must take place in our communities, and must be reflected in our national and global policies. Robust mechanisms for local stakeholders to define priorities and monitor intermediate and learning outcomes are necessary for education planning processes and should be explicitly linked to an equitable learning goal in the post-2015 global development framework.

This report takes on the debate by arguing for the rallying of the citizens of the world to call for equitable learning for all. Changing our education systems and engendering a paradigm shift is not the work of the education ministry or even the government alone; it involves every one of us – parents, teachers, students, and civil society. I call upon all of us to use this moment, when we are determining the next global development agenda, to seize the opportunity to make a difference.

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Co-ordinating Minister for the Economy and
Minister of Finance
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Four-year-old Manisha works on a puzzle at the Seto Gurans Bal Batika Early Childhood Development Center in Baglung, Nepal.

Photo: Save the Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals have been the catalyst for progress in ensuring access to education. Since governments first endorsed these goals in 2000, around 45 million children[1] who previously did not have access to education have enrolled in primary school and gender parity in primary education has improved significantly. With 2015 deadlines fast approaching, the world must now assess the considerable work that remains to be done and negotiate an ambitious yet achievable successor framework.

It is now widely recognized that we are facing a global crisis in learning. 250 million children – or a staggering 40 percent of the world's primary school age children – are unable to read, write, or demonstrate basic numeracy by fourth grade.[2] It is the poorest, most marginalized children, including those living in areas affected by conflict, who are most at risk of being out of school or being in school but learning very little.

As we draw closer to the MDGs deadline, there is growing consensus amongst UN-led thematic, country and global consultations that the focus must move from enrolment to learning. Today, the conversation is not just about whether a child gets a seat in the classroom, it's about what they learn when they get there – as well as before they arrive and after they leave. For that reason, an equitable learning agenda must be central to the post-2015 development framework. This should extend beyond a narrow focus on inputs, such as the need for books and teacher training, to include processes for stimulating learning, measuring learning outcomes, and bolstering accountability to local stakeholders.

The failure by too many schools to provide good quality education and learning outcomes for all children is not just an issue for meeting rooms and international conferences. It is an issue affecting the lives of millions of children and parents around the world each day. And it is an issue on which they have something to say.

If an equitable learning goal is to be attained globally, the framework must be supported by stronger accountability to children, caregivers, and communities. These stakeholders – including innovative civil society organizations with deep roots in local communities which we hear from in this report – are uniquely positioned to hold education providers to account and to bring about lasting change. Ensuring processes of accountability to families and communities will be critical to upholding the right to learn for every child. This must be central to the post-2015 framework.

Parents and communities play a key role in holding schools to account for learning, both directly through direct accountability relationships and through feedback to district and national level duty-bearers. Harnessing the potential power of such relationships involves:

- Fostering the engagement and participation of ordinary citizens, including the most marginalized;
- Reaching agreement on minimum standards for learning outcomes and school-level inputs;
- Collecting and communicating local data to genuinely inform and empower;
- Empowering communities to create their own solutions to local issues and acknowledge their roles in improving learning;
- Linking local accountability to national system reform.

Recommendations

It is Save the Children's hope that by hearing from parents, communities and civil society organizations themselves, international and national action on education in a post-2015 framework will both respond to and channel local voices to shape and fulfill global commitments. To that end, we provide the following recommendations for UN institutions and member states as they negotiate a post-2015 framework on education:

1. **UN Member States should advance an ambitious equitable learning goal in the post-2015 agenda that provides a framework for national level targets and minimum standards for learning against which governments and education providers can be held to account. This global goal should include:**

- Learning targets aimed at "getting to zero" (i.e. eradicating) and "narrowing the gap" (e.g. reducing wealth, gender gaps) to ensure that every child, regardless of circumstance, is able to complete primary education with reading, writing, and numeracy skills that are in line with nationally defined minimum learning standards.
- Disaggregation of all targets and indicators by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, geography, and income and tracking progress in learning across all groups. Further, targets should only be considered met when they've been achieved across all socio-economic groups.
- A commitment to targeted action, including funding, to reach the most marginalized children. This will include the development of out-of-school policies that improve the home learning environment and provide opportunities to learn in the community.

2. **As the Open Working Group begins drafting a post-2015 goal framework and intergovernmental negotiations progress, UN Member States should ensure citizen voices from the Global South – especially civil society – inform the process by:**

- Prioritizing, convening, and funding national level consultations that target input from parents and communities, particularly those representing the most marginalized children.
- Supporting the development and dissemination of information on the post-2015 process in formats and languages that are accessible for marginalized groups.

3. **Member States should ensure that any post-2015 framework is accompanied by a stand-alone goal to advance open, accountable and inclusive governance, including:**

- A formal global accountability and reporting mechanism and complementary national level mechanisms, which provide channels for accountability to poor and vulnerable people.
- The preservation of legal and political space for the free and independent operation of civil society, including a mechanism to support and facilitate civil society's ability to monitor indicators and targets, keeping progress on track.

4. **UN Member States should ensure that a post-2015 learning goal is accompanied by strengthened national and local accountability frameworks through which education provision and learning outcomes can be monitored by parents and communities, by:**

- Taking steps to improve institutional frameworks for accountability to ensure parents and communities can hold schools and governments to account, such as through joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international platform for domestic reformers set up in 2011 to ensure their governments are more accountable, open, and responsive to citizens. Participating countries should include improving local accountability in education in their OGP National Action Plans.
- Supporting better collection and disaggregation of data on learning to foster parent, teacher, and citizen engagement at global, national, and local levels. This should include support for existing initiatives, such as those highlighted in this report.
- Working with all stakeholders to reach agreement on contextually appropriate minimum standards for schools and learning, against which they can be held to account. This should be complemented with strategies to foster supportive out-of-school mechanisms for learning.

INTRODUCTION

Securing the right to learn[i] for every child

"They [the children] go to school but they don't know how to read or write even a word. We see their slates, and they don't write anything at all."

A mother in Andhra Pradesh, India

As we approach the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) targets, there is much to celebrate. Since 2000, when the MDGs and the EFA goals were set, around 45 million children[3] who previously did not have access to education have enrolled in primary school, and gender parity in primary education has improved significantly.

Yet the work ahead is urgent and formidable. 250 million children – or around 40 percent of all primary school age children in the world – either never enroll in school, fail to make it to the fourth year of their education or, if they do manage this, are not learning to read even basic sentences.[4] It is the poorest, most marginalized children, including those living in countries affected by conflict, who are most at risk.

It should therefore come as no surprise that parents are frustrated. They want nothing more than for their children to learn, to grow, and to thrive as citizens. As we hear in this report from parents in Andhra Pradesh, India, and other parts of the world, getting to school is the beginning, not the end, of the task. These parents place great value on their children's learning.

In addition to this, the global development and education communities are united in emphasizing the right to learn as the centerpiece of the post-2015 agenda, not only because learning is a powerful end in itself but also because it is an effective pathway towards achieving a diverse range of desirable goals.[5]

The impact of education cannot be measured in the number of students enrolled, or the number of hours in a classroom. It must be measured in the mastery of knowledge and skills that are relevant to the lives of students.

Save the Children believes that by 2030 all children should have access to publically funded primary schools and be achieving good learning outcomes. In other words, the full realization of the right of every child to receive a free, primary education can be achieved.[6] But this will only happen by putting equity and learning at the front and center of the post-2015 agenda and strengthening effective and accountable governance at global, national, local and school levels.

Drawing on case studies from national civil society organizations across seven countries and original research from "Young Lives" in Andhra Pradesh, India, this report demonstrates how communities, and in particular parents, have the potential to drive change and improve learning outcomes for their children. In doing so, it aims to provide a platform for those closest to the issues to have their opinions heard, recognizing the often untapped, transformative potential of parental engagement in education debates and delivery mechanisms. It is Save the Children's hope that in hearing from parents themselves, international and national action on education in a post-2015 framework will be responsive to local voices in order to shape and fulfill global commitments.

The report begins, in Chapter 1 draws on findings from interviews with a small sample of parents in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, where gains in enrollment have been met with declining levels of learning, to amplify parents' opinions about what is important in education quality. In doing so, it highlights the unique role those so closely connected to the school can play in transforming the learning experience for their children.

[i] The key principles of the right to education – availability, acceptability, adaptability and accessibility – inform our approach to post-2015 education goals. The term "right to learn" in this report is used to highlight a current, pressing challenge in the full realization of the right to education, though it should be understood in the context of all key inter-related aspects of the right to education, focused on guaranteeing free, universal primary education for all boys and girls.

While parents and other caregivers[7] are the focus of this report, we also recognize the important role of other local stakeholders, such as teachers and students, in increasing accountability for quality education for all. Although the report does not include in-depth analysis of their specific contributions to greater accountability, it does refer to the role of these stakeholders throughout.

Chapter 2 uses the findings from Andhra Pradesh, India, to illustrate some of the barriers parents experience in holding education providers to account.

Chapters 3-7 are written by local civil society organizations from all over the world that are working with parents and other stakeholders to increase accountability for learning opportunities and outcomes. All of the organizations highlighted – from Southern Africa (Equal Education), Eastern Africa (UWEZO), India (ASER-India), Pakistan (ASER-Pakistan), and Brazil (Ação Educativa) – are different. Yet they share a common desire to improve children's learning by improving the accountability of schools.

Chapter 8 draws on these examples to identify a number of lessons for enhancing accountability of governments and schools to parents. It concludes by pointing towards the need for global, national, and local education frameworks to better harness the transformative power of parents in a post-2015 world, and provides recommendations for doing so.

Several intergovernmental processes are currently underway to help define the post-2015 agenda, including the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and the African Union's High Level Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Post-2015. As government representatives gather in cities around the world to determine what lies ahead, it is imperative that voices of parents, channelled through civil society organizations such as those highlighted in this paper, continue to inform thinking at all levels.

In the pages that follow, we present their stories, struggles, and aspirations. These are their words. These are their voices. Let us learn from them.

Patience, an eleven-year-old primary school student in Kachamaenza, rural Zimbabwe, reads at the front of her classroom. With help from her teacher, she can now read in her native Shona language and English.

Photo: Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi/Save the Children

CHAPTER 1

Hearing from parents: perspectives on school quality and learning

"People…want to give their children whatever they missed in their childhood and they want their children to attain that position which they failed to get."

A mother in Andhra Pradesh, India

This chapter explores perspectives on schools and learning, of a small sample of parents from the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. As a part of its wider research exploring childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam, Young Lives (see Box below) interviewed 30 parents of children aged 9-10 years in three areas of Andhra Pradesh. For the purposes of anonymity we have numbered them: Area 1, an urban and coastal region; Area 2, a poor forested tribal area; and Area 3, a remote rural area.[8] Common to all three contexts is the existence of both free government-run schools and private fee-based schools, and high levels of poverty. Young Lives collected the data mid-2011 through semi-structured interviews. The responses of the parents were then transcribed, translated, and cross-checked by three researchers to ensure the trustworthiness of data. The interviews focused on several key questions around how parents viewed quality in their children's schools.[9]

Although the Young Lives sample is small, the experiences of these parents who are confronted with poor quality education and limited public accountability is likely to resonate with those of parents across India and in other low and middle income countries, who face similar challenges. The parents interviewed highlighted several factors they considered valuable in assessing the quality of their children's schools. Chief among these were standards of teaching and learning. Other factors included availability of information on children's progress, quality of resources and the school environment, distance of school from their home,[10] and whether the English language was taught. Here we highlight what this sample of parents in Andhra Pradesh, had to say on the most important of these factors.

YOUNG LIVES

An international study of childhood poverty

Young Lives is a study of childhood poverty globally, involving 12,000 children in four countries over 15 years. It is led by a team from the Department of International Development at Oxford University in the UK, which works in collaboration with partners in the four countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru, and Vietnam.[11]

The research seeks to inform policies and programs for children. It follows two sets of children, one born in 2001-02 and the second born in 1994-95. The methods of collecting data include:

- *A large-scale household survey of the children and their primary caregiver;*
- *More in-depth interviews, group work and case studies with a sub-sample of the children, their parents, teachers, and community representatives.*

The Young Lives team collected data on the social and material circumstances of the children as well as their perspectives on environmental and social issues within their communities. Through this data Young Lives will be able to examine how the children have grown up, taking into account comparisons across rural, urban, poverty, and gender divides as well as a variety of other factors.

Standards of teaching and learning

"However the school may be, the teaching must be good."

A father in Andhra Pradesh, India

A number of parents highlighted that in order to thrive in the future children needed to learn relevant skills in school. For example, parents in Area 1 emphasized the importance of learning computer skills. As one mother said:

> *"Nowadays most of the jobs are computer-based jobs. And for working with computers one needs good education. So unless we have good school education we cannot go for higher studies. If we educate our children in good school they will get good jobs and this means getting a fat salary and leading a nice life… We are struggling hard to meet both ends as we did not get good education and we don't want our children to suffer like us."*

Quality of learning was strongly linked to the standard of teaching. As such, "good teaching" was at the center of the kind of education that parents wanted for their children. For parents, factors that contributed to "good teaching" were: teacher qualifications, proper implementation of the curriculum, teacher attendance, and teachers and schools "taking care" of children. This latter term meant that teachers should not be indifferent to students; they should be concerned about children attending school and not misbehaving; monitor children's progress and performance; and be kind and give attention to children. "Taking care" was also sometimes taken to include a concern for children being well fed and well clothed, and teachers' communication with parents, including informing them about their children's progress.

One mother in Area 1 was not satisfied with the standard of teaching and care in government-run schools:

> *"In Government schools, the teachers are not at all bothered whether the students turn up or not to school… Nobody bothers in the government school... They are not at all bothered whether a child has done homework or not… They do not motivate the child to study well…"*

In Area 3, another mother said this of a government-run school:

> *"They never taught anything there…there was a [teacher who was a] drunkard and he used to come to the class drunk…he is not there anymore…the children used to shout and do mischief, and the other teachers used to take tuitions privately."*

One mother of a child in Area 1 suggested that teaching and learning standards had fallen in government schools:

> *"…the teaching imparted is below par. The teachers are indifferent to the plight of the students as they are paid good salaries from the Government, so they are secure and do not bother about anything. They do not pay individual attention to the students. The classes are not held regularly and the lessons are not taught properly. They do not teach the whole lesson but they just skim through it and they also do not give the answers to most of the questions and leave the children in a quandary. If the children have any doubts the teachers do not clarify that. The teaching is haphazard and there are no explanations… the teaching is not at all effective. They are blatantly letting the children mug up the subject matter [learn it by rote]. The students are learning blindly without any insight into the subject."*

As well as this general linking of teachers' performance to learning, poor literacy and reading were often used as a marker of the low levels of learning taking place. A mother in Area 2 explained that children are not learning anything at school:

> *"They [the children] go to school but they don't know how to read or write even a word. We see their slates, and they don't write anything at all."*

Moreover, a mother raised concerns about inadequately trained teachers leading to poor levels of learning in the government-run school, saying: *"The case of our village, all teachers are only Intermediate qualified…"* Another mother in Area 2 said, *"these teachers…are not bothering about how much the boys have learnt…only very few are working sincerely."*

Teacher absenteeism is a widely held concern in India, as it is in a number of other countries.[11] Parents described circumstances where teachers did not stick to school timetables or teach their lessons, and often referred to teachers not turning up to work. Absenteeism was also often raised in conjunction with, or linked to, concerns over the standard of care teachers demonstrated.

For example, a mother in Area 2, who had no formal schooling herself, and has four daughters, complained about teacher absenteeism in the village government school:

> *"One teacher comes, he stays for an hour, then he says he has to apply for something [do some administrative work] and he goes off...[then he] comes and signs [takes the attendance register] and when the bus comes, he leaves..."*

Another mother in Area 3 recalls:

> *"The children used to fight. My co-sister's son also used to study there; he always used to get hurt and come [home], the other children use to beat him. When we ask, 'what [did] the teacher do?' he says they [the teachers] were inside, then when I asked him why didn't he inform them, he says they will be sleeping."*

Information on children's progress

Parents valued openness and transparency, in particular, access to information on children's progress and updates on exam and test results. One mother in Area 1 discussed what she liked about her child's school:

> *"In private schools, they give us progress report and conduct tests regularly."*

Another mother from Area 2 indicated that regular updates and academic progress are signs of a good school:

> *"Studies are better…they conduct exams periodically…send the results… they also write letters indicating the performance/improvement between 1st test and 2nd test…if we go and meet them, they will tell 'how your son is studying'…whether studying well or not."*

Quality of resources and school environment

The third factor mentioned relates to school facilities, availability and quality of resources including food, and the appearance of school buildings. A father in Area 3 described his vision of a good school and included facilities as well as teaching in his definition:

> *"The classroom should have facility for the children to sit, with boards all around, and the teachers teaching well and clearly. Then it will be a good classroom."*

A mother in Area 3 explained how she had moved her child from Government school, to private school, and back again to Government school as her daughter had wanted to go to the same school as her friends. The mother said of the government-run school:

> *"...and everything was nice and neatly maintained...There are lots of teachers there [the Government school]. They are nice. They teach her well."*

Another mother from Area 1 raised concerns about the infrastructure and quality of facilities such as bathrooms:

> *"The atmosphere is not good…that is the toilets will not be clean, all the surroundings also."*

In the two rural sites, parents frequently mentioned schools providing food as a factor. A mother in Area 2 explained a range of factors that make a good school, including food:

> *"It should have everything… It should give good food. They should teach properly and all the facilities should be good. Then it is a good school."*

A father in Area 2 listed a range of qualities relating to infrastructure including the provision of facilities for girls:

> *"There is everything there, they have every facility there even for girls if they get stomach pain or headache…their clothes are clean and neat, the books and other things will be within their reach…"*

This chimes with the prominence given to well-being and child safety as an aspect of "good teaching". It is not just what happens in the classroom or the state of that classroom that matters to parents, but where the classroom is.

Conclusion

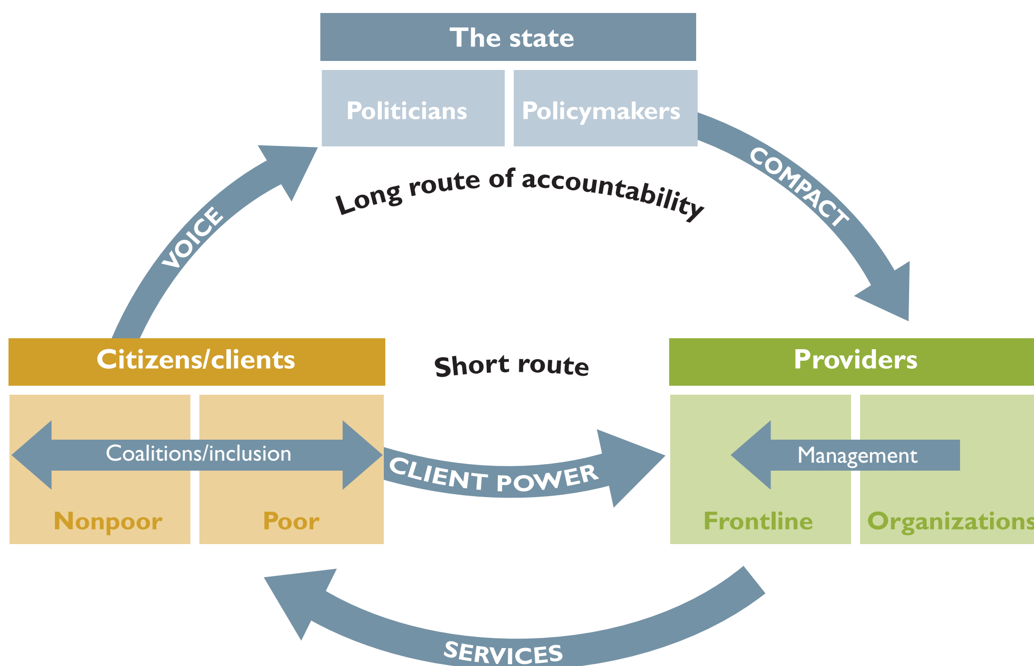
These findings illustrate the complexity of identifying factors that constitute a quality education. However, they also show that learning in order to secure a good future is central to parents' views of what constitutes a good education and a good school, and that this is strongly related to the quality of teaching.

Many of the parents interviewed are dissatisfied with the government run schools and were "voting with their feet"[12] by moving their children into the private school system, despite evidence that oftentimes the learning outcomes in these schools are no better.[13] As we have noted elsewhere,[14] such action often has the effect of further undermining quality in public schools, thus increasing growing quality gaps between public and private provision, widening inequalities in learning outcomes, and exacerbating wider societal inequity. In order to stem this tide it is essential that parents are encouraged and supported to channel the

dissatisfaction they often feel towards education providers into demanding change in those aspects of provision that matter most, such as learning outcomes and teaching quality, including teacher accountability.

Local level accountability can play a critically important role in driving improvements in education provision. This is not a new concept. Indeed, ensuring that schools and local governments listen and respond to parents and communities has been regarded as important for some time, with the World Bank's 2004 World Development Report highlighting the "short" accountability route between empowered citizens and responsive providers (Figure 1).[15] As education delivery and financing become increasingly decentralized, these "short" accountability relationships take on added importance.[16]

FIGURE 1: ACCOUNTABILITY ROUTES



Source: World Bank. 2003. *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People.*

With current debates on a post-2015 development framework often happening at a global or national level, it is important to renew emphasis on the role, and the right of local "service users" to shape the provision of education in ways that are contextually relevant and responsive to local need. There is evidence to suggest that strengthening these "short" accountability routes could have significant impacts on improving intermediate outcomes in education, which in turn can catalyze improvements in learning outcomes and efforts to leave no one behind.[17] Enhancing accountability relationships between parents and schools can also strengthen longer accountability relationships through which engaged and organized citizens hold the primary duty-bearer – the state – to account for education provision and learning outcomes.

The remainder of this report draws on research from Andhra Pradesh, India, and the experiences of a number of local civil society organizations to identify challenges to greater local accountability between schools and parents and ways in which these can be overcome. In doing so, it also begins to identify how such local accountability can be harnessed for national level reform.

CHAPTER 2

Overcoming the barriers: making education accountable to parents

"What can we ask or do? We are small people. Those who are well off put their children in private school."

A father in Andhra Pradesh, India

The research undertaken by Young Lives in Andhra Pradesh, India, though drawing on just a small sample of parents, illustrates the two primary barriers often faced by communities in holding service providers to account: lack of information regarding entitlements, and feelings of powerlessness to demand change.

INFORMATION ON ENTITLEMENTS

Young Lives asked parents where they source information on school quality. The research demonstrates that many of the parents rely on informal sources of information and their own experience to judge school quality rather than against a more objective set of minimum standards. However, it also demonstrates important differences in access to information between parents in rural and urban settings and by gender.

Parents in the rural settings cited listening to the views of family members or friends and their own personal experience of schools as their main sources of information. This can be contrasted with the parents in the more urban area who sourced information by visiting the school. The majority of parents interviewed did not mention government, civil society organizations or community groups as sources of information on where to send their children or on the quality of schools. Instead, sources of information tended to be more informal.

Mothers may defer to more educated male relatives for advice on matters related to education. In Area 3, a mother explains that her brother-in-law used to take the children to school:

> *"He would go to school and oversee everything. Since he is educated, he would oversee."*

Another mother in Area 3 mentioned that her father-in-law knew someone who recommended a particular school. When asked about who enquired about the school, she replied:

> *"Yes, he enquired and he only got him [the child] admitted". And in terms of asking about the school she replied, "What can we say? Wherever he says, we will join [enroll the child]."*

POWER TO DEMAND CHANGE

The research in Andhra Pradesh found that the parents' sense of power to demand improved education from service deliverers was related to their socio-economic status and whether or not they were directly paying for education provision.

Parents in the poorer, rural areas who had low levels of education felt they were unable to ask about their children's schooling. A mother in Area 3, when asked what she thought about private schools, replied, *"How would I know all these things, madam, will I make any enquiries?"* When asked what her son's marks were like, she said, "We never asked"…" Another mother when asked to describe *"a good school" said, "What do I know? …You know things better…"*

In contrast, some mothers from the urban site were more comfortable approaching teachers and schools for information and as such were very informed about their children's schools. One mother explained that she can tell whether a school was good or not *"by keeping the children in view [keeping an eye on the children]."* She says she often goes to visit the school. The interviewer asked, *"You mean you decided according to the marks?"* The mother replied, *"Not only by the marks but by the way of her reading also."*

> *Most strikingly, however, parents who were sending their children to fee-paying schools felt they were more entitled to hold these schools to account as they were directly paying for the service.*

One mother in Area 2 explained:

> *"For private schools, we pay money, we can question them [the teachers] if children come home early or if they don't study well. If they don't teach properly, we won't send the children to their school, but in*

Photo; Sanjana Shrestha/Save the Children

Government [schools] the teachers come and teach for the sake of their salaries, so they just come and go daily."

Another, in Area 3, sends her son to private school and her daughter to the government school. When asked about her daughter's school, she said:

"That is a government school. In a private school, if they do not teach well…we can ask them strongly about it. But that is not the case with the government schools. They might ask us something in turn…but I am an illiterate…so we just leave it like that. But here because we pay, we have the right to ask."

Conclusion

The research with parents in A.P., India implies two important findings with regards to barriers to greater accountability of schools to parents. First, parents often judge quality subjectively rather than from an understanding of the minimum standards of provision and outcomes they are entitled to expect in relation to education. And, second, payment gives parents a sense of entitlement to demand quality, which is not as prevalent among parents in the public funded system.

This points to the importance of ensuring parents know they have the right to monitor schools against a set of minimum standards with regards to quality, and underscores the need to increase the sense of entitlement among caregivers to hold schools accountable to children's right to learn, irrespective of whether or not they are directly paying for provision.

In the next five chapters we profile the work of inspiring civil society organizations that are finding ways to overcome these barriers. All are different, yet they have much in common.

The five increasingly powerful organizations – situated in South Africa, East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda), India, Pakistan and Brazil – are having a significant impact working with communities and parents to improve the quality of education and children's learning outcomes by improving the accountability of public schools. Their simple, yet innovative approaches shine the spotlight on national levels of learning and school quality, using this knowledge to influence education policy and practice. In the process of spreading awareness of children's learning levels among parents and communities, they increase the community sense of responsibility, elevate the importance of learning in education dialogues, and stimulate the momentum for widespread social change locally and nationally.

In the clamour of global dialogue, civil society organizations such as these, from low resource settings, often go unheard. Here, we let the organizations speak for themselves.

CHAPTER 3 – UWEZO

Information on learning outcomes as a catalyst to spur citizens to act: examples from Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya.

By Sara Ruto

UWEZO OVERVIEW

Set up in 2009, Uwezo is currently running in three East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The Uwezo model follows that of the ASER-India model: measure to understand, understand to communicate, and communicate to change.

Uwezo aims to shift the dominant focus in education from infrastructure and enrollment to improving levels of learning for all children in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Key data from Uwezo:

- 20 percent of children cannot read basic sentences or perform simple numeracy tasks
- Children from poorer households perform worse than children from richer households
- In its first four years Uwezo has aimed to improve levels of literacy and numeracy by 10 percent

The Uwezo initiative aims to draw public attention to educational challenges by researching and reporting on actual learning levels of children living in East Africa. Inspired by the Annual Status of Education Report established by Pratham, one of India's biggest NGOs, the Uwezo approach is simple. Uwezo conducts annual household assessments of basic literacy and numeracy levels in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The tests are based on the Class [Grade] 2 curriculum expectations of each country. Every year, Uwezo partners with over 350 local organizations to mobilize and train over 22,000 citizens to conduct the survey. In 2012, the Uwezo army of citizen volunteers assessed a total of 343,104 children in 124,627 households across 362 districts in East Africa. The annual assessments collect data that, once analyzed and shared, is used to promote countrywide conversations and debates about learning. It is the hope of Uwezo that these conversations and debates will eventually spur citizens to act in order to improve the quality of education in their local communities.

Photo: Child with John Mugo, Kenya/Uwezo.

Photo: Volunteers, Kumi distrcit, Uganda/Uwezo

ANNA'S HOPE: QUALITY EDUCATION FOR HER CHILD IN KENYA

This is the story of Anna, a young mother who lives in the foothills of Mount Kenya. Anna has two children, four-year-old Hamisi and two-year-old Maria. Anna's main source of income is a 2-acre farm that belongs to her parents. The farm is cultivated in every corner so every day Anna has a long list of jobs and chores, from harvesting potatoes to caring for livestock. Anna's chief concern is to give her children the best opportunity to succeed in life. For her, this means investing the income from her family's farm in formal education.

Anna and her mother work on the farm to raise school fees for both Hamisi, who is enrolled in a private pre-school, and for Anna's sister, who attends a local secondary school. Anna could easily have taken the simpler path, by enrolling her child in the local, free public primary school that she attended. But for Anna, this was not an option. Anna explains that the quality of education is very low in government schools, and teachers and some parents do not care. The quality is so lacking that she will do whatever it takes to raise the US$36 needed per term to ensure her son attends the private nursery school.

It is no easy feat. Every day, she must walk her son almost five kilometers to get to the private school and when she returns she must continue with her daily chores. Once Hamisi has gained basic competencies in reading and math, perhaps in Class [Grade] 5 or 6, she might consider transferring him to the public school. Anna's vision of what she must do to ensure her child gets the best quality education is very clear and she represents a growing group of involved parents who want a better education for their children.

No matter their literacy or education levels, parents like Anna can play a significant role in improving the quality of education in public and private schools. Yet, too often, this role has not been defined or brought to prominence. Forums that discuss and deliberate what parents can do to support and promote learning exist, but they are largely inaccessible to most parents. Only a small elite group of parents, for example, will attend School Management Committees. Parents like Anna often do not sit in these sessions, perhaps because they are viewed as too young, or simply because they cannot spare the time. Yet she represents the groundswell that can give momentum to bring the needed changes in the education sector. Though she does not voice it in these words, it is clear that problems such as quality of education, accountability levels and apathy amongst teachers in public schools worry her. Quality of the school buildings and other infrastructural concerns are of secondary interest to her, in comparison to what happens within the classroom, and whether or not her child is learning.

Community engagement has enormous potential in tackling issues of teacher and student absenteeism, ensuring education providers are held to account, and demanding more from the system, which annually receives one of the highest budgetary allocations in Kenya's public sector. Key to unlocking this potential is to ensure parents and caregivers are equipped with the information that will enable them to demand change, with pupils' learning levels as the measure of success.

Anna is one of the Uwezo data collectors who annually assess children in her village. As a data collector, Anna is trained in basic research principles and with information that improves her own perception of educational provision. She is part of a group that is already energized, has agency, and is motivated to drive large-scale change.

Photo: Guardian and her children, Uganda/Uwezo

The majority of parents in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda are not like Anna. Many believe once they have enrolled their children in government schools, it is the responsibility of educational professionals to take over. Some parents may also be disillusioned. They attended school, but have nothing to show for it, so do not see how it will be any different for their children. Or perhaps they want to engage with schools but lack the know-how, because the effects of their own experiences of school, illiteracy, and economic disadvantage have disempowered them.

As the Uwezo evidence confirms, the vast majority of public schools and also many private schools, have failed to provide children with the skills to progress in life. Across East Africa, less than one third of Class [Grade] 3 children possess basic literacy and numeracy competencies at Class [Grade] 2 level. Two in ten Class [Grade] 7 pupils do not have Class [Grade] 2 level competencies in literacy and numeracy. After having conducted three rounds of national assessments over three years, the evidence has remained largely unchanged.

Parents involved with the data collection for Uwezo are exposed to the education challenges that exist in their local area. However, there are millions of parents and citizens throughout East Africa who also have a right to know how their children are performing, and how well they are learning. Ever since Uwezo started collecting data in 2009, it has been committed to communicating its findings. Communication, in simple and accessible formats, is at the core of all Uwezo activities. Information has to be easy to understand, meaningful, and memorable. If all parents in a particular village are equipped with statistics showing, for example, that seven out of every ten Class [Grade] 3 children in the community was functionally illiterate, they would be armed with information that would lead to discussion and debate. Eventually local discussions would feed into a national conversation that policymakers would have to listen to. Every parent wants the best education and opportunities for his or her child. It is this desire that ignites the agency existing within people to make a change that will enable their children to learn, and therefore, to succeed.

In communicating its findings, Uwezo shares information in meaningful ways rather than merely producing technical reports and policy briefs. To engage people in meaningful discussions on education, the organization presents its findings in a variety of formats. Radio has proven to be a powerful medium of mass communication. Uwezo strives to produce engaging radio content that both creates awareness around the Uwezo findings and captures the attention of listeners. Owezo's focus is on programs that already have audience share, using popular forms such as stories, discussions and drama, in the languages that are most familiar and comfortable for audiences.

Uwezo does not offer recommendations or solutions. This is because Uwezo believes that concerned citizens – whether parents or politicians, teachers or technocrats – are best placed to be able to create their own solutions to local issues.

Uwezo has seen that, when citizens have a clear incentive to take action to create change in their own communities, locally grown solutions and answers are often innovative and unique.

Following on this maxim, Uwezo believes that the drive for more accountability will ultimately come if parents, as the largest constituency of concerned citizens, are able to be involved and participate in the success of the school. This could mean a number of different things. If parents were to visit the school during scheduled parents' days and open days, get to know their child's teacher, plan to join the parent-teacher association or school management committee, or just do something as simple as ask their child what they learned at school today, conversations would begin to take place that create the foundations for change.

If this is met by a responsive school that demands "success", and by educational professionals who continually seek to ensure that institutions "educate rather than school", then Anna might be convinced that the public school can offer her child a meaningful learning experience.

CHAPTER 4 – EQUAL EDUCATION

Equal Education (EE) in South Africa: Campaigning for minimum standards in all schools

By Yoliswa Dwane

EQUAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Equal Education (EE) was set up in 2008 and has been campaigning to ensure quality and equal education in South Africa. Through analysis of issues facing schools the campaigns are led by the activism of students, teachers, parents and community members. Equal Education has followed several methods to ensure country wide support, including:

Youth led campaigning;

- Activities to increase support such as marches, photo competitions, radio broadcasts' and rallies;
- Use of the Courts to hold government ministers accountable when they fail to deliver their legal obligations;
- Collecting data and information to show communities the extent of problems facing schools.

EE is a movement of learners, parents, teachers and communities fighting for equality and quality education in the South African education system. Many may ask why there is a need for an organization of this nature after liberation and the attainment of democracy in South Africa. With this thinking in mind, many international donors have reduced their financial support to organizations in South Africa or withdrawn it altogether. This has resulted in some civil society organizations having to reduce their reach or close down their operations, leaving many causes unsupported. Our education system is failing the youth of South Africa. Many children are not able to read, write and count.

As communities have become more dissatisfied with non-delivery, corruption, and a weak state, the government has introduced new and repressive legislation, such as the Traditional Courts Bill and Protection of Information Bill, which are designed to silence citizens, especially vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth. Political attacks against civil society organizations and activist movements demonstrate the increasing hostility towards the demand for improved conditions. This is the context in which EE is tackling educational issues and accountability. It has become increasingly necessary to hold government accountable to its promises.

This chapter offers a brief overview from South Africa showing how ordinary people can pressure the government into meeting its Constitutional obligations and promises.

Education in South Africa is marked by inequality and poor quality resulting from the discriminatory policies that were implemented by the repressive and racist Apartheid regime. Amongst the systematic issues we face today as a result of this unjust past, is a school infrastructure crisis.

Research shows (and as can be seen from EE campaign photos [images 1 and 2]) that many schools in South Africa have inadequate infrastructure and facilities, and are under-resourced and overcrowded. This has a significantly negative effect on academic performance.

The South African Schools Act requires the Education Minister to set legally binding minimum norms and standards that will define what a school requires. Although, the Act is liberal, we believe that the magnitude of the infrastructural challenges and the urgent need to fulfill the right to basic education requires the state to act decisively and immediately.

Equal Education's strategy to tackle this issue began by building support among learners, parents, communities, and the broader South African public.

This was necessary to gain the widest support. Mobilizing learners and communities with key demands that are informed by research and evidence is essential. Through this process, young people and children were enabled to raise their voices in the opportunities they were given to write to newspapers, send letters to the Minister of Basic Education, and speak about their experiences of the infrastructural condition in their schools and the impact that this had on their learning and rights to dignity and equality. In the public domain, this campaign has already been won. After campaigning for two years, and after many official promises to promulgate the school infrastructure regulations, the Minister refused to fulfill these political commitments. At this point, EE approached the courts. This forced the Minister to sign a settlement, which she later did not fulfill. Campaign activists were angered by the Minister's blatant disrespect, her disregard of the conditions they were facing in schools and her failure to honor the political commitment she had made.

Equal Education ran a social media campaign to draw the public's attention to the Minister's delay tactics, and simultaneously approached its legal team on the matter of returning to court against the breach of the settlement agreement. We also organized over 2,000 school learners to march to the Minister's office in Pretoria in July 2013, and the court ordered the Minister to promulgate minimum norms and standards for school infrastructure in line with the Schools Act. Although, we have criticisms of this draft, it is a significant improvement on the draft that the Minister released in January. We have to keep an open mind about the outcome of this process. The next step will be to ensure that the court order is implemented fully and that the regulations on school infrastructure are put in place. This will require Equal Education to provide information on the norms and standards in the court order to schools and communities, so they can monitor implementation and respond to challenges when they arise.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN: 500 BROKEN WINDOWS

Khayelitsha is a working-class community in Cape Town with a population of approximately 700,000 people, and 54 schools. It was here that Equal Education mounted its first campaign, 500 Broken Windows. Researchers from EE had been working closely with many schools in Khayelitsha, monitoring all the difficulties teachers and learners faced in providing and accessing quality education. They encouraged students to take photographs of conditions in their schools that impacted on learning. One photograph depicting broken windows stood out as representing the terrible infrastructural conditions at many of these schools. There were 500 broken windows in total at the school. Teachers and learners complained that it was very difficult to concentrate in the cold classrooms and that this was a barrier to learning. The problem of broken windows represented well, the importance of a school environment that is conducive to learning.

In response, Equal Education set up meetings with the school management, teachers, learners, and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). However, the WCED was slow to provide support. EE created a petition calling for the windows to be replaced and also for learners to keep them that way, which garnered 2000 signatories.

To gain further public support, EE organized a rally of 450 Khayelitsha learners in Cape Town. Members of the EE youth group, high school students known as Equalizers, supported the action. They wrote articles for the local press, gave interviews on local radio stations, and spread the news of the campaign to their family and friends. Those taking part in the rally made placards and wrote poems and songs to get their messages across.

Equal Education also wrote letters to the WCED calling for a timeline of planned work, and arranged a meeting attended by 200 members of the community and education department officials. After six months of continuous campaigning and considerable community support, the windows were finally fixed – a great victory in the campaign for quality education.

MOVING FORWARD: EVIDENCE BASED, COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

The 500 Broken Windows campaign provided important lessons. Most notably, Equal Education realized that more must be done to encourage the community, particularly parents and teachers, to get involved in changing the conditions at their schools.

Since 2008, the organization has pursued evidence based, community led campaigns to address problems in schools. The approach starts with research and uses the evidence acquired to educate and empower activists, gather support and push for change. Equal Education's Policy, Communications, and Research Department produces in-depth research, which is circulated to members,

politicians, and the public. Key messages from this research are communicated to the public using national and local press, television, and radio. Marches, demonstrations and pickets are organized to expose the issues and emphasize the need for political and public involvement.

Image 1: Mud-Hut School in South Africa.
Photo: Equal Education

Image 2: Students outside their Junior Secondary School in South Africa.
Photo: Equal Education

Equalizers, EE's most active members, are at the center of much of its work. These high school students are from predominantly poor and working class areas. They engage with the organization through a variety of activities ranging from weekly youth groups, mass meetings, camps and marches. Equalizers play a leading role in the activities of the organization. They work with EE, along with parents, teachers, activists, and community members, to improve schools in their communities. They set an example to their peers through their dedication to their own education, and in addition to boosting EE's growing youth support, has helped to mobilize the support of parents and communities. Parent networks ensure that parents are informed and given a platform to support the advancement of equal and quality education in South Africa.

Many parents have experienced negative or harmful school environments, having been educated under Bantu Education. These parents often felt intimidated and were less aware of what to expect from schools and government. To develop understanding of educational issues among parents and to encourage their support and action, Equal Education has run educational workshops with parents and involved them in campaigns, advocacy work and school based projects, such as supervised after-school homework classes.

Image 3: 20,000 Equal Education activists march on Parliament on Human Rights Day, 2011.
Photo: Equal Education

Equal Education has secured tangible victories with regards to textbooks in Khayelitsha, broken windows, improving student punctuality, and infrastructural conditions in poor schools. The organization has compelled the Minister to issue norms and standards for school infrastructure, an ongoing campaign that will yield significant and far-reaching results. It has succeeded in keeping schools open that the Western Cape government wanted to close, and in securing places for learners who were facing discrimination on the grounds of language, race or religion.

Equal Education develops understanding of the educational system, whilst drawing attention to problems faced by schools and communities. By equipping ordinary citizens with this knowledge, EE offers them a new way for to participate in the democratic process and effect change in the education system and society at large. Today, the state of our education system is at the very forefront of the political agenda, and it is the most talked about issue in South Africa. This heightened public awareness around education is largely due to the impact of Equal Education's work.

CHAPTER 5 – AÇÃO EDUCATIVA

Collective action to improve the quality of education in Brazil

By Claudia Bandeira and Luis Felipe Soares Serrao

AÇÃO EDUCATIVA OVERVIEW

The Ação Educativa is a non-governmental organization active in the areas of education, youth and culture, developing formation activities, consulting, research, information, networking, and joint organizing in campaigns and advocacy actions. Founded in 1994, its mission is to promote educational rights and youth, aimed at social justice, participatory democracy and sustainable development.

As a part of its wider aims, Ação Educativa set up the Indicadores da Qualidade da Educação (Quality Indicators in Education) in 2003. The Indicators work in the following way:

- They set up groups of local community members;
- The group encourages the whole community to participate in self-evaluation of the problems facing their schools;
- The data is collected;
- Using the data, the group develops an action plan;
- Actions are then taken to improve schools.

Key Facts

The Indicators have shown that the school community has a vital role to play in the development of quality education. The indicators have had an impact in communities, including the following outcomes, among others:

- Implementation of action plans with the participation of the school community expanded dialogue between the schools and the organs of the educational system.
- The work has encouraged increased funding for schools.

EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF BRAZIL

Recently the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the most economic, educational, and overall inequities in the world. Despite limited progress in reducing poverty over the years, inequalities remain. This is largely a result of heavily relying on economic growth to reduce poverty prior to the crisis of 2007 and 2008 (UNDP, 2010, p. 25). In Brazil, in the first decade of the millennium, 40 million people escaped poverty. However, data from the last Census in 2010 showed that the poorest 60 percent accounted for only 19.23 percent of the Brazilian income, while the richest 10 percent accounted for 48.9 percent. It is no wonder, then, there was only a small decrease of 6.2 percent of the Gini index, which ranged from 0.63 in 2000 to 0.60 in 2010.

In light of this inequality, civil society in Brazil has played a key role in the struggle for guarantees and for the expansion of rights. Education is a key factor in the development of a more just, equitable, and environmentally sustainable society. However, it is clear that more structural changes to society and education policies must be articulated within a wider sphere of policies tackling resource distribution and power, and considering factors such as income, gender, and race/ethnicity.

In the context of improving education quality, a holistic approach is needed that also addresses wider inequality. It is necessary for the government to introduce social policies that are adequately financed to improve the wages of professional educators, encourage public action in the educational field, tackle inequalities, and establish participatory and democratic processes of defining educational policies.

Existing education quality indicators in Brazil's Index of Basic Education Development (IDEB) have focused on school access and student performance. But access and performance only give part of the picture and education quality should be assessed in a more holistic and contextualized way, addressing inequalities, inputs, and processes on top of access and performance.

The Brazilian IDEB led to increased pressure on education providers to achieve goals and outcomes. With respect to educational management, this measure encourages ranking and competition between schools, and helps to deepen inequalities in the system and educational networks.

AÇÃO EDUCATIVA'S INDICADORES DA QUALIDADE DA EDUCAÇÃO (QUALITY INDICATORS IN EDUCATION)

Without replacing existing national indicators or belittling their value as tools for monitoring educational quality, Ação Educativa has designed and implemented Indicadores da Qualidade da Educação (Quality Indicators in Education). These offer a complementary instrument more directly engaged with school communities and more effective as an incentive to support the engagement of collective action to improve the quality of education.

The Quality Indicators in Education have been developed by Ação Educativa in order to build and disseminate a set of qualitative education indicators that are easy to understand. They involve the different stakeholders of the school community – students, teachers, administrators, family members, employees, representatives, organizations, and social movements – in a participatory self-evaluation of school quality. From the perspective of creating effective conditions for the democratization of the school, the methodology was designed so that the community gathered to assess their reality, identify priorities, establish and implement action plans, and monitor their results. In short, the initiative facilitates an environment in which the community gathers to identify issues impacting on quality within their local school. This then leads to the creation of an action plan to address the issues raised.

For the collection of indicators under the Quality Indicators in Education, there are several steps that must be carried out. They are:

1. Preparation of material and setting up the initial stages: It is important that the whole school community understands the dimensions, indicators, and methodology proposed prior to the evaluation. A group of local representatives or a commission is elected to oversee the process. They meet and discuss how to engage with the community and begin to set up initial processes such as the dissemination of information on the indicators, and to organize meeting rooms and materials.

2. Mobilization of the school community: The local representatives, composed of different members of the school community, need to create communication strategies to invite the community to participate in the assessment in school.

How does the commission encourage community engagement?

There are many ways to engage the community, including:

- Notices in newspapers and local radio
- Letters to parents
- Raising awareness among parents and students outside school gates
- Talking to students at school
- Campaigns and networks to raise awareness of school quality

3. Assessment day: All those who wish to be involved are organized into groups to discuss the indicators. Depending on the size of the school and the number of participants, groups are divided. Smaller groups tend to facilitate better participation and engagement of all group members. Groups are made up of different stakeholders such as staff, members of municipal councils, students, and their families from the surrounding community. This allows several actors to give opinions and discuss the meaning of educational quality in the context of their community, and the country or state. The results of the group discussions are discussed in the Final Plenary with all participants.

Photo: Ação Educativa

How does the process ensure the input of students?

Ação Educativa values the input of students in the process and has developed particular strategies to ensure their participation:

- Facilitate conversations during school time.
- Work with students both individually and in groups drawing on the key themes and areas of concern to ensure every student can participate.
- Use innovative resources to help students communicate day-to-day issues at school. Ação Educativa has used drama forms, such as role play and short theatrical sketches, to foster student participation.

4. Preparation and implementation of action plans: From the results of the Final Plenary the main challenges are identified and a plan of action is developed by a group of local representatives. Various representatives of the school community implement the plan of action to improve the quality of education and schools.

Studies and research reports dealing with the use of Quality Indicators in Education for approximately 60 public school systems showed several impacts on school quality and community participation. A clear output is in the participatory assessments leading to collective action plans for schools, including influencing and setting up political-pedagogical projects, the school calendar, curriculum guidelines, and teaching. Furthermore, participatory assessments have strengthened collective bodies like the School Board, the Association of Parents and Teachers, and the Student Guild.

Schools that used the Quality Indicators in Education noted a greater involvement of school communities in areas such as resolving conflicts between students, children's progress in reading and writing, improving the provision for disabled students, the disclosure of school events, the discussion of various educational issues (such as ethics and inclusion), school decision-making processes, and networks between teachers to promote inclusion for children with disabilities.

Among the achievements in the wider educational field, the creation and revision of national and local education plans began to include more participatory and democratic processes, reinforcing the principle of democratic management of education advocated by national legislation.

For example, between 2010 and 2012 an experiment was conducted in a city in the state of São Paulo where information was collected in a number of education facilities. School representatives then met with the staff of the Department of Education to discuss the results and priorities raised by the communities. The whole process resulted in the Secretary of Education taking action to meet the demands of schools on improving facilities, improving accessibility for disabled students, increasing the number of staff in schools that where understaffed, and conducting training programs for teachers.

Photo: Ação Educativa

In this sense, the Quality Indicators in Education also serve as an important tool to facilitate dialogue and collaborative work with central agencies that meet the aspirations of the school community, have legitimacy, and are based on the agendas of schools to build their education plans. Using Quality Indicators in Education gives strength to the demands for the conditions necessary for a quality education. Central to this is ensuring that the community is organizing around a political project.

CHAPTER 6 – ASER INDIA

Learning for all: the challenge of taking everyone along Examples from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) – India

By Rukmini Banerji

ASER INDIA OVERVIEW

In 1996, the Annual Status of Education Report evolved from the work of the NGO Pratham in developing basic reading tools to assess children's learning levels. ASER is now a nation wide, annual assessment of children's literacy and numeracy skills. Since 2005, the ASER survey has been collecting information with the aim of providing reliable data on enrollment and children's basic learning. Owing to its success, the model has been adopted in Pakistan by ASER Pakistan and in East Africa by Uwezo.

ASER takes the following three-pronged approach:

- Measure to understand
- Understand to communicate
- Communicate to change

Key data from the latest ASER in 2012 demonstrates that although ASER records 96 percent primary enrollment in India, around 60 percent of children cannot read properly and 45 percent cannot do basic arithmetic.

Photo: Save the Children

THE BLUE SARI MOTHER – ILLITERATE, DISEMPOWERED BUT KEY TO IMPROVING LEARNING FOR ALL

In a quiet corner of eastern India, in a village in Rohtas district in Bihar, a group of women were chatting in the mild sunshine of a late winter afternoon. You could see green rice fields stretching in all directions. The village primary school was also visible through the trees in the distance. School was over. Children had come home, abandoned their books and bags, and were now playing outside. As they talked, the women were cleaning rice. It was a good time for having a chat. (I was in the village, with some colleagues, to explore how mothers, especially those who were illiterate or not schooled, perceived the question of learning).

"How is the education in this school?" I asked. "I send my children to school," said one woman. "I even send my son and daughter to tutoring and buy them books." Several women joined the conversation. "How do you know if your child is learning?" I wanted to know. "How can we tell?" they asked. "We are not literate. But we send our children to school and we send them to tutoring also. So they must be learning."

I invited children to come sit on the edge of the women's circle and read. What I had were a few reading tasks – letters, words, simple paragraphs and a short 8-10 line story – all in big font, printed on white paper [see Hindi Reading Tool image]. The children were curious. They crowded around me, some looking over my shoulder, others leaning over each other. The text was basic; simple and familiar everyday words, sentences and contexts that children could relate to. All of it was easier than the lessons in the Grade II textbook. All the children tried to read; many could read the letters and some could read the words, but only a few managed to read the paragraph and the story.

The women watched. There was a woman in a blue sari. Her daughter was in Grade IV and could not read. "Do you know if your child can read this?" I asked the blue sari mother. "How am I supposed to know?" she argued back, "I myself cannot read." "Which of these are the hardest to read, do you think?" I continued pointing to the letters, words and sentences. "I don't know. I am illiterate," she answered, somewhat irritated. "Look at the paper, look at these things, what seems easy and what seems difficult?" Now my blue sari mother became adamant. "Why are you forcing me? I told you I cannot read."

On the sidelines, her eight-year-old daughter was enjoying the interaction. Perhaps she was enjoying it because the tables were turned. She began to persuade her mother to focus on the task on hand. With some hesitation on her side and much encouragement from her daughter, the blue sari lady began to concentrate on the paper. Pointing to the letters, she said, "This one must be easy because many children could do it. That one (pointing to the story) is not easy because even bigger children could not do it."

I persisted. "Do you know when your child has a fever?" "Of course!" She looked at me in surprise; all mothers know when their child is sick. "What do you do when your child has a fever?" I asked her. The blue sari mother replied instantly: "That's simple. I feel her forehead. If it is hot then I know she has a fever. I do some simple things at home. If in two or three days the fever does not go down, I take her to the doctor. I can even take her to a private doctor. I ask the doctor for some good medicines. After another few days the fever does not go down then I will take her back to the same doctor and fight with him." "So you have a MBBS degree?" I said. "What is that?" she asked suspiciously. "That is a medical degree," I replied. "Oh. No, no," she laughed. "Remember I told you that I am illiterate," she informed me.

"I am very puzzled," I continued. "Why is it that even though you are illiterate you know exactly what you need to do when a child has fever, but when it comes to her schooling you don't do anything when she cannot read?" The blue sari mother was ready with her answer. "That is very simple," she explained. "We go to the doctor only sometimes; only when there is problem. Not every day. It is not the doctor's job to come and take care of my children. I have to do it. But the teacher is with my child every day. My job is to send my child to school and teacher's job is to teach my child. I am doing my job and so she should do her job."

Photo: Blue sari mother/ASER India

This mother's story is not unusual. ASER aims to inform all parents, even those who feel they are unable to demand better learning outcomes for their children and equip them with the understanding and the information they need to meaningfully participate in thinking about how important learning is for their children and how their children's learning can be improved.

Today, almost all of India's children are enrolled in school. This journey to ensure schooling for all has needed massive efforts from both governments and communities. The credit goes to governments who provided schooling opportunities and access. And equal credit goes to parents who have been sending their children to school in ever-increasing numbers for the last decade or more. India has approximately 200 million children in the 6-14 age group. All figures show that more than 95 percent of children of this age group are enrolled in school.

While enrollment levels in India continue to be impressive, available data on basic learning shows worrying trends: according to the Annual Status of Education Report 2012, close to half of all children in Grade V will complete the primary stage of schooling without being able to fluently read text at Grade II level. The situation in arithmetic is even more alarming. For example, it is expected that children will be able to do subtraction of two digit numbers with borrowing by the end of Grade II, but according to ASER estimates, in 2012 only about half of those in Grade V could do it. More alarming is the fact that this capability seems to be declining with each subsequent cohort that is moving through school.

Every year since 2005, ASER has carried out a citizen led effort to understand the status of children's schooling and basic learning. In every district in India there is a local organization that conducts ASER, using a common set of simple tools and a common sampling frame, and then disseminates its findings. More than 25,000 volunteers working with over 500 local institutions and organizations across the country were involved in ASER 2012. Together they reached 16,000 villages, over 300,000 households and well over 600,000 children. The ASER findings at national, state, and district levels have helped to put the issue of children's learning squarely at the center of the educational debates and discussions in India. Inspired by ASER, other countries like Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali, and Senegal have all started citizen led assessments of their own.

Non-governmental organizations like Pratham, and others, are using ASER's findings to push learning to centerstage in education discussions in India, and to compel government and parents to think about what needs to be done to improve learning. This wide-ranging transformation, policies and practices, assumptions and activities need to respond to the problems not just at the top but also in the middle and at the bottom. The next challenge that India needs to undertake has to be the journey of ensuring learning for all. Taking parents along on this journey is critical, urgent and long overdue. ASER 2012 shows that approximately half of the mothers of children who are in school today have not been to school themselves. Roughly estimated, there are probably 100 million mothers who are like our blue sari mother in Bihar. To enable such mothers to participate, new methods and mechanisms have to be innovated on a large scale to allow mothers to enable them to play a meaningfully role in discussions of and actions related to how children's learning can be improved. Simple tools like those used in ASER are a good starting point. They help ordinary people understand where children are today and enable them to think about where they need to be tomorrow. These initiatives build our capacity as people, whether in the government or in the family, to think about what we want and how to get there. They are building blocks in the process of understanding what works and what does not.

For example, using some of the lessons learned from ASER, Pratham worked in 500 villages in rural Rajasthan and Bihar – areas with very low levels of literacy among women.[18] The aim was to understand what kinds of activities done with mothers lead to the improvement of their children's learning.[19] During the course of this work we found that mothers (like the mother in the blue sari) can support their children's learning through a variety of methods like doing activities together, looking at their children's notebook, "reading" picture books/cards, and going to the school together to ask teachers what they can do to help at home. But all of this needs two important steps – first, to understand the status of children's learning and second, to be persuaded that being illiterate is not necessarily a disqualification for helping children learn. Once these barriers are removed, even mothers with no education can begin to participate.

There is a lot of talk in the development world about accountability. But perhaps we need to work hard at a prior task, that of building engagement. Engagement means understanding. Engagement implies learning from our reality. To bring people in, engagement needs simple tools and methods and activities. Once we know what the problem is, we should also be able to think about what to do to solve it. Engagement means thinking about what "I" can do and what "we" can do, and figuring out what our children are entitled to and what we can demand. What our own children need is exactly what the children of the entire country need – a strong, supportive home and a good, effective school.

The work of ASER is based on the fundamental notion that we need to understand the situation before we can act. To understand the situation, we need curiosity; we need to see if indeed there is a problem. If we do not know, we cannot act. Only when we understand, can we think of what to do next. Waiting for the government alone to improve things will take a long time. In Pratham's and ASER's work alone, more than 75,000 volunteers participated in one way or the other last year to help children's learning. Like the community volunteers and the parents in the village, it is essential that we get involved in measuring, then understanding, and then acting to improve the future of our children. Some say that ASER leads to greater accountability; we say ASER leads to understanding, ownership, and responsibility for action.

Without the active engagement of parents and communities, the path towards learning for all will remain uneven and unfinished.

ASER: spreading to other parts of the world

The ASER collects information on learning outcomes, informing governments, ministers, teachers, parents, and communities about the quality of education in their schools. Inspired by ASER in India, other countries like Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali and Senegal have all started citizen-led assessments of their own.

Photo: Susan Warner/Save the Children

CHAPTER 7 – ASER PAKISTAN

Citizens and governments must take action to improve the quality of education: The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) in Pakistan.

By Baela Raza Jamil, Safyan Jabbar, Imtiaz A Nizami, and Sahar Saeed

ASER PAKISTAN OVERVIEW

Four rounds of ASER, including a pilot, were completed in Pakistan between 2008 and 2012. The ASER seeks to fill a gap in educational data by providing accurate information at the national level that is comprehensive and easy to understand. The objectives are:

- To get reliable data on children's basic learning (literacy and numeracy levels);
- To compare the change in levels of learning from previous year; and,
- To interpret these results and use them to affect public action and policy decisions at various levels.

Key data from the 2012 ASER in Pakistan

- 23 percent of children aged 6-16 are out of school
- 50 percent of children in Class [Grade] 5 cannot read properly
- 50 percent of children in Class [Grade] 5 cannot perform basic arithmetic tasks

FROM COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY – IMPROVING EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY

Reaching 251,444 children in 82,521 households, 4,033 villages, and 4,226 urban blocks in 2012 alone, ASER Pakistan is a powerful accountability movement that has been initiated with and for citizens to create a clear connection between universal learning and sustainable access to education. For ASER, these two dimensions are inextricably linked and non-negotiable if all children are to realize their fundamental right to education.

First initiated in Pakistan in 2009, the ASER movement's coverage has grown from 11 to 142 out of 145 districts, each year providing ranked and gender disaggregated data across households, villages, districts and provinces. The data reflects student learning levels, enrollment, attendance, teachers, facilities, multi-grade classrooms, and grants to government schools. Additional household data also provides information on mother tongues spoken, parental education, and proxy indicators for income in order to generate findings about levels of inequality.

Despite occupying space in the Economic Survey of Pakistan, in key government documents and in sector analyses both within and outside of Pakistan, ASER remains at its core down to earth and people driven. The message is simple: citizens and governments alike must aggressively and creatively take action to improve the quality of education.

The journey of ASER has very much been the journey of the Right to Education Article 25 A, which was inserted in the 18th Amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan on April 19, 2010, making it a state obligation to provide free and compulsory education for all children aged 5-16 years. The article was a breakthrough for citizens' rights as it provided evidence to the entire nation of the state's commitment to fulfilling the fundamental right to education. To promote the implementation of Article 25 A, ASER spurred the One Million Signature Campaign, which was undertaken in two rounds with two million signatures collected from both in and out of school children in a record time of 13 months.

The signatures were presented nationally and globally to Gordon Brown and the Government of

Pakistan in November 2012 and April 2013. In response, various levels of government have begun to recognize education as the highest priority: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Sindh and Balochistan provinces have enacted laws and ordinances for Article 25 A, while Punjab and Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa provinces have drafted bills that are awaiting presentation to the provincial assemblies. These initiatives have cumulatively created the evolution of the Citizens Movement for Quality Education (CMQE)[20] campaign informed by evidence collected by ASER Pakistan.

ASER Pakistan is today symbolic of the power of citizens coming together in an organized manner with systematic capacity building for measuring children's learning capabilities. Through a process of data collection, dissemination of findings, and community decision making, ASER has translated these national conversations into a citizen led accountability movement at the local level, and its evidence is now part of the annual Economic Survey of Pakistan prepared by the Ministry of Finance.[21] The process begins when two trained survey volunteers[22] are dropped off near a randomly selected target village. They make their way to the central space in the village and share their purpose with village leaders and community members. A rough map with coordinates is collectively drawn up, and the village is divided into quadrants for logically selecting households for participation. The first house is selected randomly and thereafter every fifth household, and five households per quadrant, are included. In each of the 20 total households, the survey team knocks on the front door or gently lifts the heavy cloth to seek permission and to explain the purpose of the visit. Children, mothers, and grandmothers often gather to ask what will this survey do for them: no one has come to assess their children's learning before, so will it lead to something good for their children? The team settles in to fill out the household survey form and then conduct the children's learning assessment for all 5-16 year olds present in the household. Usually a kind family member insists that the volunteers enjoy a glass of fresh milk or *sharbat* (juice) as a thank you for their dedicated service.

When each of the approximately 600[23] households per district have been visited, the data is presented in a report, which is disseminated widely and also repackaged in easy to understand formats such as posters, district report cards, ranking sheets by indicators, and policy briefs. These materials create awareness among the media, academics and researchers, civil servants, parliamentarians, and policymakers about the learning levels of both in and out of school children. However, beyond these stakeholders, ASER's primary constituency comprises the communities and parents who can be empowered to stimulate national debate and bottom-up action. The distancing of parents from making education and schools their concern and taking responsibility for their child's learning conditions is the central message of ASER. ASER recognizes that building a solid evidence base is necessary, but communicating the evidence to primary actors is crucial if any changes in understanding, policies and practices are going to take place.

ASER also believes that parents and politicians, teachers and technocrats will do the right thing when they are compelled to do so and have a clear incentive to act. ASER therefore places great emphasis on the communication of findings and the fostering of informed public understanding and debate about children's learning and what can be done about it. The incentive for parents and citizens has to be their children, in their households, in their communities and schools, and in their villages. ASER anticipates that over time, the communication of actual literacy and numeracy levels will lead to a realization among the general public and policymakers that simply putting children in schools is not enough to generate learning gains, that there must be greater concern about why children are not currently learning and how learning can be improved.

Photo: ASER Pakistan

MOBILIZING LOCAL COMMUNITIES – ASER'S PRIMARY CONSTITUENCY

Each year ASER holds village gatherings, called Katcheries, Baithaks or Jirgas depending on where you live in Pakistan.[24] These gatherings are organized at school and/or community sites for sharing ASER findings, mobilizing volunteers for education, and deciding upon actions with community members, youth, parents (including mothers), teachers and government field officers. They begin with ASER by sharing the objectives of the conversation and reminding the attendees of the survey recently conducted in the village. The results are then shared, underscoring that while the survey is based on a sample of 20 households, the trends represent the whole village. This information then leads to many conversations and reflections in the community acknowledging gaps in taking actions for education, lapses in accountability and the role of the village school, its teachers and the larger system of education. The discussions are like a mirror for the community and parents: they begin to see more clearly the state of learning of their own children and education in public and private schools in their community.

Once the discussion reaches a climax, the ASER facilitators give a call for action. Who will ensure that children are enrolled on time and brought to the school? Who will take turns to see if the teachers come to school on time? Who is educated at least up to Class [Grade] 12 and will volunteer to teach an eight to ten week accelerated literacy and numeracy program for out of school children and at risk in school children with the lowest learning levels? Who will write to the government with a request to improve the facilities and shortage of teachers? The community is stirred into action, and the energy for education is unleashed.

Sustained flows of information and debate and ideas for practical action will create pressure from below and support an ecosystem of educational change that will propel individuals, communities and eventually key institutions to act in response. By engaging citizens to act as monitors and decision-makers for the public and private provision of education, ASER is a testament to how school systems and education policy can be influenced at the grassroots level.[25] It is due to this engagement that government and private citizens alike eagerly await the results each year. In the run up to 2015, ASER has become a powerful force in the push for "learning for all" to take precedence over "schooling for all" in global agenda setting conversations.

Photo: ASER Pakistan

CHAPTER 8

Strengthening local accountability: lessons from the South

"They [parents from the poorest areas] are not second-class citizens. Their opinion is important. Parents know which school is a good school. Social pressure for quality can be exerted even by illiterate parents."

Claudia Costin, Education Secretary, Rio de Janeiro[26]

The examples in the preceding chapters highlight the potential of direct "short" accountability relationships between citizen and service provider to strengthen the quality of publicly funded education and, in doing so, improve the learning outcomes of millions of children currently being failed by state provision. Though each country context is different, the case studies point to a number of themes that emerge as central to the effectiveness of local level accountability irrespective of context. These themes are as follows:

1. Fostering the engagement and participation of ordinary citizens, including the most marginalized

The case studies highlight that the first step towards greater local level accountability is citizens believing that they have an intrinsic right to provide feedback on the services they receive and for local schools to be responsive to this feedback. Moreover, parents need to believe that this is by virtue of being a citizen rather than a right that is only available to those who have "bought" it through the payment of school fees. The examples from UWEZO and ASER illustrate this powerfully, as well as the need to design contextually appropriate strategies to ensure parents are aware of their right to engage in the quality of their child's schooling and provide relevant information that allows them to do so in a meaningful way. They also illustrate the need to design accountability mechanisms that are sensitive to the particular needs and situations of some of the poorest to ensure that marginalization is not further exacerbated because illiterate or poorer parents don't have access to this information.[27]

Relatedly, though this report has focused predominantly on the role of parents in local accountability, ensuring the involvement of all members of the community, including children, teachers, and government officials is crucial for effective accountability. The campaigns supported by Equal Education demonstrate how collective action from all stakeholders can have greater impact on the rate and level of change. The following examples demonstrate, through country examples of work done by Save the Children staff and partners in India, Nigeria, and Nepal, how to encourage and foster the participation of multiple stakeholders.

Photo: Susan Warner/Save the Children

SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN INDIA AND NIGERIA

INDIA

In India, the Right to Education Act, 2009 (RtE Act, 2009) gives the fundamental right to free and compulsory education for all children aged 6-14. The Act also emphasizes decentralized school management and therefore has a provision for a School Management Committee (SMC) in every primary/elementary government school. 75 percent of SMC members are parents and are responsible for making a School Development Plan, monitoring school functioning and providing community support to school for over all educational improvement. 50 percent of SMC members should be women.

The constitutional provision of SMC's and having a majority of parents as members (regardless of their educational level or social position) creates a participative and collaborative environment and encourages community ownership in the education process.

In addition to strengthening the Right to Education Forum (the largest network of the civil society groups in the country on RtE) Save the Children, India has been working extensively with the SMCs at ground level and have trained more than 7,000 SMC members in last three years in the project areas.

NIGERIA

Save the Children Nigeria has supported the Community Engagement and Learner Participation initiative, which is a part of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN). The initiative supports 43 civil society organizations and the government to develop the capacity of School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) to support schools and begins to articulate demand for inclusive, quality basic education services. SBMCs are promoted as a vital link between service users and service providers and as a mechanism for channeling voice, including that of commonly marginalized groups (women, children, girls, nomadic communities, etc.), and for improving accountability.

How does the Community Engagement and Learner Participation initiative work to improve accountability and schools performance?

- 56,220 SBMC members are activated, trained and mentored over a 12 month period to get involved in school planning and governance, resource mobilization for school improvement, and support to inclusive education.
- Civil society and government partners work closely with the traditional and religious institutions in supporting SBMC development and also link to the media for stronger community voice.
- To ensure the voices of communities, including women and children, are heard the program supports SBMCs to develop women's and children's committees for enhanced participation and networking.
- The program also supports local and state government capacity to listen to and plan for education demands arising from communities, civil society, and partners.
- Increased decision-making power for women with regard to access, equity and school development planning and resource utilization.
- Networking, advocacy, and lesson sharing has meant best practices can be shared nationwide supported by resources from federal government agencies.

The model is no longer limited to only six ESSPIN states but is now a nationwide initiative in partnership with the Universal Basic Education Commission. The Commission has invested N233m (£932,000), being federal resources, to scale up the ESSPIN model nationally, a strong basis for long term sustainability.

CHILD CLUBS IN NEPAL

Child clubs in Nepal enable children to exercise a greater voice in the development of their schools and to hold teachers, communities, and governments accountable for improving the quality of education. In Nepal, the National Framework on Child-friendly Local Governance includes minimum standards for child participation such as the formation of child clubs within local school governance structures. Child clubs supported by Save the Children began to emerge in the mid-1980s and there are now an estimated 13,000 clubs in Nepal, which have been initiated by both local and international NGOs as well as students themselves. The clubs hold regular meetings at which elected student leaders and members discuss how they can represent the issues most affecting students to the school management committee and parent teacher association. This method of elevating pressing issues is particularly effective because students often feel more comfortable raising their concerns with fellow students than with adults. Students have used the child clubs as a platform to combat issues such as teacher absenteeism, inadequate supply of textbooks, resource misuse, and corporal punishment.

2. Agreeing on minimum standards

In order to hold schools accountable for the quality of education they are providing, parents need to know the minimum standards they can expect in relation to both learning outcomes and school level inputs, such as teaching, text books and provision of sanitary facilities. Equal Education's work in South Africa to push for the elaboration of minimum norms and standards in line with the South African School Act, is an example of using the legislative process and the judicial system to do this at a national level. The example of Ação Educativa's community-developed Quality Indicators in Education presents an alternative way in which to develop and agree on minimum standards for school accountability. Human rights frameworks provide a useful starting point for the elaboration of such minimum standards.

3. Collecting and communicating local data to genuinely inform and empower

It is important to underscore that in each country the specific approach to empowering parents and communities will be different, reflecting the unique circumstances and linking to traditions. Notwithstanding, there are some clear lessons emerging from the case studies about collecting and using data in a way that leads to positive transformation of learning outcomes.

Firstly, engaging communities, including the most marginalized, in data collection is critical to building community ownership of the issues. Secondly, information on its own is insufficient: the organizations highlighted in this report are assiduous in their analysis and presentation of the data. They may have different audiences – ASER in India often target their work at governments at the national and state level whereas much of the information produced by UWEZO is targeted at local communities – but they spend considerable time analyzing the data and using information to genuinely inform and empower through a variety of communication channels. Thirdly, the more accurate and transparent the data collection processes and communication the more likely communities and government officials will engage, thus strengthening the impact of civil society actions. Fourthly, the collection and use of data should be linked to a clear strategy for achieving change. Local civil society organizations play an important role in working with parents and communities to elaborate and monitor such strategies.

So although information is important in making education accountable to parents, information alone is not enough and should be met with effective accountability mechanisms and viable improvement options. For example, recording poor early literacy rates which are then matched with teacher training programs in early grade reading can improve learning outcomes. The following example from Zimbabwe provides a case study example of how better dissemination of information can improve learning outcomes.

READING TO LEARN IN ZIMBABWE

Cleopatra Nzombe, Manager of Education and Child Rights Governance, Save the Children Zimbabwe

In 2010, Save the Children staff and education partners in Zimbabwe received a nasty shock: despite having worked in some districts for more than five years on a variety of projects, ranging from teacher training, school rehabilitation, purchasing textbooks and working with marginalized groups of children, a reading assessment revealed that children were just not learning. After receiving this news, we approached both the District Education Offices as well as the Provincial Education Offices in order to call urgent attention to this crisis. The results of the reading assessment, coupled with large numbers of students who were failing national examinations, ignited a debate that has helped to elevate the issue of children's learning as a national priority.

One question struck a chord with members of Zimbabwe's education community: "Are our children learning to read or reading to learn?" In other words, are we helping our children develop the literacy skills they need to succeed? Save the Children has been helpful by advocating at the provincial and district level for education policies that promote the culture of reading as a key to learning. In two of the provinces where we work, the Provincial Education Directors have made it compulsory for schools to set aside an hour every week in which teachers engage in reading activities with children. We also seek to address this problem by forging a strategic partnership with the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Teacher Education (DTE), and by continuing to work closely with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The DTE serves as Zimbabwe's standards, quality control and accreditation body for all teacher training colleges in the country, and exerts significant influence on national curricula. By sharing our research findings, organizational expertise and experiences with the DTE, we have helped to strengthen training and support for student teachers around teaching reading to children.

In order to maximize impact, Save the Children works collectively to run a "cascading" model of training. In this model, every school term a core group consisting of district personnel, school heads, and senior teachers attends a three-day district training on various concepts of teaching reading. This core group then splits into small groups and is provided with materials to carry out the same training at cluster level, and, from there, the training is conducted at school level. This approach ensures that all teachers in the district receive the training. We have also been working with the DTE to develop support materials, including a manual that is now in schools for teachers to use in class after they receive the training.

Though the project is still young, marked improvements have been noted in children's performance. At one of our Save the Children supported schools, Mahetse Primary in Matobo District, Grade 3 teacher, Mrs. Namate, remarked, "At the beginning of the year, only 10 children in my class of 42 were readers and this was a big challenge for me. I was fortunate to be given an opportunity to attend two workshops facilitated by the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Teacher Education, where I was taught various methods for teaching reading to my pupils. Now with just one more school term to go 29 of my pupils are reading and I'm working on various strategies to ensure that before the year ends all my pupils will be readers." Save the Children – together with our partners in Zimbabwe – hopes to reach a point where all children in our project areas can read to learn and fulfill their dreams and future aspirations.

4. Empowering communities to create their own solutions to local issues and acknowledging their roles in improving learning

Encouraging parents to collect data and ensuring the information is communicated effectively to everyone, opens up citizen-led solutions that support long-term, real change driven by even the most marginalized groups in society.

The case studies each illustrate how, once issues were identified and effectively communicated, citizens engaged in dialogue that acknowledged gaps and suggested solutions. Interestingly, these conversations do not just focus on the roles of teachers and local school and education officials but also that of the parents and communities. Discussions encouraged each member of society to ask the question, "What can I do and what can we do to make a difference?" ASER-India noticed that illiterate parents, in particular, had difficulty in seeing how they could make a difference. After careful research and through lessons learned, ASER began to break down the barriers felt by illiterate mothers. Parents were encouraged to become more engaged in their children's learning through a variety of activities such as looking through notebooks, "reading" picture books and cards, and going to school to ask the teachers how they can help at home. These activities have encouraged all parents, including those who are illiterate, to find other solutions and participate in change. The creation of this sense of mutual accountability at the local level for children's learning is a pre-condition for sustained positive change in learning outcomes.

5. Linking local accountability to national system reform

Though each of the case studies focus on improving local provision of education through the strengthening of "short" accountability relationships between parent and school, they also point to the potential to draw on the findings and pressure exerted by local initiatives to influence national level policy, which in turn has an impact on local provision. Organized civil society plays a crucial role in strengthening these longer accountability routes, for example, in the case of ASER India and Pakistan, generating evidence and demand across a number of different sites that can then be used to influence nationally.

Linking local accountability to national system reform becomes all the more imperative in the light of increasingly decentralized education delivery and financing. It provides a "feedback loop" to national level policymakers to better understand if decentralized approaches are working to support quality education at local levels. Ação Educativa has worked to ensure its Quality Indicators of Education complement the national indicators encouraging buy in and support from national level implementers and those with decision-making power.

Conclusion and recommendations

Quality of education is a global issue and there is growing consensus that not only education but also learning, must be the global priority in the post-2015 development framework. The question is how to achieve this, and a key part of the story has. local manifestations and local solutions. As we have highlighted in this report, increasing the accountability of schools to parents has the potential to transform education provision and learning outcomes for all children by raising the quality of publically funded schools. If we are serious about reversing the current trend in learning, as we continue to debate a post-2015 agenda we need to ensure that the framework for international and national action on education will both respond to and channel local voices to shape and fulfill global commitments. Realizing the potential of education as a force for liberating talent and for forging more prosperous and equitable societies will require radical change and improvements in the post-2015 development agenda. To that end, we provide the following recommendations:

1. UN Member States should advance an ambitious equitable learning goal in the post-2015 agenda which provides a framework for national level targets and minimum standards for learning against which governments and education providers can be held to account. This global goal should include:

- Learning targets aimed at "getting to zero" (i.e. eradicating) and "narrowing the gap" (e.g. reducing wealth, gender gaps) to ensure that every child, regardless of circumstance, is able to complete primary education with reading, writing, and numeracy skills that are in line with nationally defined minimum learning standards.
- Disaggregation of all targets and indicators by age, gender and income, and tracking progress in learning across all groups. Further, targets should only be considered met when they have been achieved across all socio-economic groups.
- A commitment to targeted action, including funding, to reach the most marginalized children. This will include the development of out-of-school policies that improve the home learning

Photo: Elieen Burke/Save the Children

environment and provide opportunities to learn in the community.

2. As the Open Working Group begins drafting a post-2015 goal framework and intergovernmental negotiations progress, UN Member States should ensure citizen voices from the Global South – especially civil society – inform the process by:

- Prioritizing convening and funding national level consultations, which target input from parents and communities, particularly those representing the most marginalized children.
- Supporting the development and dissemination of information on the post-2015 process in formats and languages that are accessible for marginalised groups.

3. Member States should ensure that any post-2015 framework is accompanied by a stand-alone goal to advance open, accountable and inclusive governance, including:

- A formal global accountability and reporting mechanism and complementary national level mechanisms which provide channels for accountability to poor and vulnerable people.
- The preservation of legal and political space for the free and independent operation of civil society, including a mechanism to support and facilitate civil society's ability to monitor indicators and targets, keeping progress on track.

4. UN Member States should ensure that a post-2015 learning goal is accompanied by strengthened national and local accountability frameworks through which education provision and learning outcomes can be monitored by parents and communities, by:

- Taking steps to improve institutional frameworks for accountability to ensure parents and communities can hold schools and governments to account. For example, this could be achieved by joining the the Open Government Partnership (OGP), an international platform for domestic reformers set up in 2011 to ensure their governments are more accountable, open and responsive to citizens. Participating countries should include improving local accountability in education in their OGP National Action Plans.
- Supporting better collection and disaggregation of data on learning to foster parent, teacher, and citizen engagement at global national, and local levels. This should include support for existing initiatives, such as those highlighted in this report.
- Working with all stakeholders to reach agreement on contextually appropriate minimum standards for schools and learning, against which they can be held to account. This should be complemented with strategies to foster supportive out-of-school mechanisms for learning.

ENDNOTES

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5. US Basic Education Coalition (2011) *Annual Report 2011.*
6. Every child has the right to free education. This has been enshrined in international law since 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and more recently in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as well as within the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals generating the commitment of 164 countries in 2000.
7. It should be noted that the term "parents" refers to parental caregivers. In some contexts the term "parents" may refer only to the biological mother and father whereas here we use the term interchangeably with "caregiver" to refer to a broader definition of those who are responsible for the needs of the child in their upbringing, for example, food, clothes, housing, emotional needs and also wider issues such as health and schooling.
8. The Young Lives sample is pro-poor and thus not representative. More information is available on the research methodology and details of the study in background paper: Young Lives (2014) *Parents' views of good quality school in Andhra Pradesh, India'.*
9. Key questions include: What do parents view as good quality education? What aspects of a school do parents most worry about (i.e. what do they understand by "quality")? Learning outcomes? Exam results? Teacher absenteeism? Facilities? Do parents (and children) identify factors that would help improve school quality? To what extent are parents satisfied with public schools? What are parents' views of state provision in the absence of the availability of private alternatives? Is it the perception that public schools have worsened in recent years? For more information please refer to the background paper: Young Lives, (2014), *Parents' views of good quality school in Andhra Pradesh, India.*
10. There were some other factors mentioned by parents such as distance. One mother in Area 2 had moved her son back home because she had concerns about her child travelling to school: *"… to go to [Private] school the boy has to cross the road… that is the main reason… whatever may be teaching and caring, crossing the road is the problem… we won't be there…"* In settings with a limited supply of schools, distance to school was held above quality as a factor in deciding where to send a child to school.
11. Young Lives is funded by the UK Departmen for International Development and co-funded from 2010 to 2014 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
12. Particularly in government run schools. See also Kingdon, G (2007) 'The Progress of School Education in India,' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 23 (2): 168-195; Ramachandran, V, M. Pal, S, Jain, S. Shekhar and J.Sharma (2005) Teacher motivation in India. New Delhi; UK DFID for more general information on teacher absenteeism.
13. Hirschman (1978: 96) cited in James, Z. and M. Woodhead (forthcoming, 2013) Choosing and changing schools in India's private and government sectors.
14. Young Lives Working Paper [Insert the number and a full stop after it]. [change the rest to] See also Singh, R., and S. Sarkar (2012) Teaching quality counts: how student outcomes relate to quality of teaching in private and public schools in India. Young Lives Working Paper 91.
15. Save the Children *(2013) Ending the Hidden Exclusion: Learning and Equity in Education Post-2015.*
16. World Bank (2003) *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People.* Washington, DC: World Bank. See also Devarajan, S., S. Khemani, and M. Walton. (2011) *Civil Society, Public Action and Accountability in Africa.* HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP11-036, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Available at: http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/5131503.
17. Decentralization is becoming increasingly prevalent. For example, in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Finland, France, Hong Kong-China, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, the United States and Zimbabwe, are among countries that have a decentralized education system. See for example Brewer and Smith (2008) for a general overview.
18. Bruns, B., D. Filmer and H. A. Patrinos (2011). *Making Schools Work: New evidence on accountability reforms.* World Bank. See also, Jimenez, E. and Y. Sawada, Y. (1999). Do community-managed schools work? An evaluation of El Salvador's EDUCO program. The World Bank Economic Review, Vol. 13, Issue 3, 415-415.
19. ASER Centre (asercentre.org) is the autonomous research and assessment unit of Pratham (pratham.org) – one of India's largest NGOs working in elementary education. The ASER work evolved out of Pratham's experiences of moving from assessment to action. Using a variety of delivery models, today Pratham works in over 150 districts of India partnering directly with village communities as well as school systems in order to ensure that every child is in school and learning well. In 2012-13, Pratham's activities reached close to 2 million children across India.

20 JPAL (Abdul Jamil Poverty Action Lab) based in MIT did a randomized evaluation of these interventions. Available at: http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/impact-mother-literacy-and-participation-programs-child-learning-india.

21 Citizens Movement for Quality Education is a four pronged citizen led program across Pakistan informed by the nationwide Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). We have started different initiatives like the children's literary festival, Chalo Parho Barho (lets read and grow), RTE campaign, etc. All these converging programs are informed through ASER and have energized millions of people and large coalitions for dialogues etc. Hence, we have given all the programs one single term i.e. citizens movement for quality education.

22 Islamabad [insert full stop, delete parenthesis, change retrieved to Available, end with full stop] (Retrieved from: http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_1213.html).

23 The volunteers do not belong to the same village as that leads to a certain level of bias in terms of house selection and assessment. Aser Pakistan believe that volunteers should belong to the same area (in terms of districts or can be of a nearby village) but s/he should not be of the same village to ensure that s/he actually conducted the survey through its procedure instead of doing it as per his/her convenience or preference.

24 600 households are selected for each of the 136 rural districts of Pakistan whereas the sampling methodology for the urban blocks is different (thereby leading to a different number other than 600 households per district for urban blocks).

25 In Punjab and Balochistan it's called Baithak, in Khyber Pakhtoonkhuwa and FATA it's called Jirgas, and in Sindh it's called Katcheries.

26 Volunteers conduct the actual survey and collect data from their own community. Here we use 'community' because it refers to the same area (i,e. of the same district / or of a nearby village).

27 Quoted in Pearson (2012), *The Learning Curve,* p.30.

28 World Bank (2011) *Making schools work: new evidence on accountability reforms.* Washington, DC: World Bank See also Hsieh, C. and M. Urquiola (2006) "The Effects of Generalized School Choice on Achievement and Stratification: Evidence from Chile's School Voucher Program." *Journal of Public Economics* 90 (8-9): 1477-1503.

THE RIGHT TO **LEARN**

Community participation in improving learning

The past decade has witnessed unprecedented progress with millions more children in school. But alongside this progress there is a new growing crisis – a learning crisis – with millions of children unable to read, write or calculate. The world must now assess the considerable work that remains to be done to ensure all children are both in school and learning.

As The Right to Learn shows, a key factor in overcoming the crisis is the engagement and action of parents and local communities to demand improvements in their children's schools and learning outcomes.

Drawing on contributions from five organisations: UWEZO in East Africa, Equal Education in South Africa, Ação Educativa in Brazil, ASER in India and ASER in Pakistan, this report showcases their work. It highlights effective approaches to empower parents and communities to demand change in the face of poor quality schooling and poor learning outcomes.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations. First and foremost, the report calls on UN Member States to advance an ambitious equitable learning goal in the post-2015 development agenda that provides a framework for national level targets and minimum standards for learning against which governments and education providers can be held to account.

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