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**Effective Schools and Quality Improvement**

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The Equity Imperative**

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**Effective Schools for  
Disadvantaged and Underserved Populations**

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## 1. ABSTRACT

1. Achieving the goals of Education For All will require that countries more effectively meet the educational needs of the segments of their populations currently least able to access and succeed in school. Complementary education programs are designed specifically to extend the reach of formal public schooling in developing countries to better serve the most disadvantaged and/or remote areas. Through such programs, non-governmental actors support these underserved communities in creating and running their own schools.

2. Over the past two years, the Education Quality Improvement Program of the United States Agency for International Development has conducted eight case studies of complementary education programs in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, Honduras, Mali and Zambia. This paper summarizes the findings of those eight case studies and reveals that these particular complementary models are helping address issues of access for underserved regions in their respective countries. The complementary programs are also proving more effective than regular public schools at assuring completion and learning. Preliminary analysis of the costs of such programs indicates that they present cost-effective strategies for making progress towards the EFA goals of improved access, completion and learning.

3. This research, and the growing experience of many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrate how countries' long-term plans and strategies for meeting the goals of Education For All will need to incorporate complementary education programs. Partnerships among ministries of education, decentralized education offices, local communities, parents and non-governmental agencies can enable effective schools to be developed, operated and supported in even the most disadvantaged areas of a country.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

4. Quality basic education can be provided to the world's most disadvantaged populations. The poorest most vulnerable children in each country can enroll in school, complete a primary education, and acquire learning. And all this can be done in ways that are cost effective. For example:

- BRAC primary schools help rural children complete sixth grade three times more cost effectively than regular public schools in Bangladesh, and BRAC students out perform public school students in reading, writing, and math.
- Community schools, serving primarily girls in the rural hamlets of Upper Egypt, produce fifth graders able to pass the national examination twice as effectively as regular public schools.
- Community-based schools, serving a large population of HIV/AIDS orphans in Zambia, are twice as effective as regular public schools at producing grade seven completers who meet minimum standards in English and math.

5. This paper draws on systematic analyses of eight programs designed to reach and adequately meet the educational needs of disadvantaged children to show how the least favored populations in countries can be effectively educated. For this paper effectiveness is defined in terms of student completion and learning, for example, the percentage of students who complete the primary grades covered by the program and the percentage of students meeting some learning standard (the actual learning standard depends on the available measure for the country and/or program in question). Cost-effectiveness is also evaluated by associating recurrent costs with the rates of completion and learning obtained by the different complementary education programs. Whether we are talking about children in the more remote areas of Bangladesh, Egypt, Mali and Ghana, or young adults who dropped out of primary school in Honduras, or AIDS orphans in Zambia, or even children facing government repression and the ravages of war in Afghanistan, the programs and projects drawn on for this paper have been effective at assuring access, completion and learning for these children.

6. How are the educational needs of historically disadvantaged and underserved populations being met?

7. No great institutional breakthrough has been made. In the cases reviewed for this study, and in numerous other community-based complementary education programs, on-the-ground, non-governmental networks of support are simply able to help communities organize and operate schools. In the community-based schools of the complementary programs studied, locally recruited, under-qualified and minimally compensated teachers produce educational outcomes that meet or exceed what regular public schools are able to obtain. No great pedagogical secret has been uncovered. The community-based schools and local teachers studied are just more consistently able to assure a basic opportunity to learn. They do this through smaller classes, use of local language, regular attendance by both teachers and students, and continuous support and training for teachers and families.

8. This paper presents the quantitative and qualitative evidence that demonstrate how programs designed to serve the educational needs of some of the world's most disadvantaged children are able to succeed. A brief overview of each case is presented in Section 3. For each case, the population targeted, the nature of the educational and organizational models applied to reach the target population, as well as the levels of access, completion and learning obtained, are discussed. Section 4 provides a summary discussion of the most pertinent implications for EFA drawn from the experience of these complementary education programs. Evaluations of each program's effectiveness are shared in Section 5, and estimates of cost-effectiveness are presented in Section 6. Section 7 presents the conclusions of this study.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

9. The eight cases researched over the last two years are all “complementary education” programs. These programs are designed specifically to complement the government education system in each country and are *not* meant as non-formal alternative programs. Rather, in each case, the programs provide a different approach to helping children obtain equivalent educational outcomes to students in regular public schools. Also, in each case, the programs are targeted to serve populations that had limited access to government provided schooling. Cases were chosen that have demonstrated effectiveness in increasing access and completion. Availability of data limited the pool of cases, and those for which some documentation is available were selected. It was also important to include cases that dealt with crisis or post-crisis situations (hence the inclusion of Afghanistan and Zambia). Table 3.1 below summarizes some of the basic information about each case.

Table 3.1: Summary of Complementary Education Case Studies Included in the Research

| Program                                    | Target Population                                 | Level of Education   | Enrollment at Peak of Program |
|--|---|--|-------------------------------|
| Afghanistan: CARE community schools (COPE) | Rural children, especially girls                  | Complete primary cycle through grade 6 with transfer into government schools throughout  | 45,513                        |
| Afghanistan: IRC home-based schools        | Rural children, especially girls                  | Complete primary cycle through grade 6 with transfer into government schools throughout  | 14,000                        |
| Bangladesh: BRAC primary schools           | Rural children                                    | Complete primary cycle to grade 5 in four years (then modified to five)                  | 1,000,000                     |
| Egypt: UNICEF community schools            | Rural children, especially girls                  | Complete primary cycle to grade 6  | 4,700                         |
| Ghana: School for Life                     | Rural children                                    | First three years of primary school, with transfer into government schools at grade four | 9,000                         |
| Honduras: Educatodos education centers     | Young adults who had not completed primary school | Complete primary to grade 6 in three years, and complete lower secondary to grade 8      | 117,000                       |
| Mali: Save the Children community schools  | Rural children                                    | Complete primary cycle to grade 6  | 50,000                        |
| Zambia: community schools                  | Orphaned and vulnerable children                  | Complete basic education to grade 7  | 500,000                       |

10. The BRAC primary education program in Bangladesh began in the mid 1980s and can be said to have served as a model for many other community-based, NGO-supported approaches to providing primary education to rural, disadvantaged populations. The community schools in Egypt, Mali, and Ghana are to some degree inspired by the BRAC model. In Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana and Mali the programs grew out of a need to help reach rural populations that had much less access to schooling, with particular attention to the needs of the girls in those rural communities. Devising ways

to create, operate and support schools that were more accessible to remote populations was the central challenge, met in each case by promoting smaller schools located in the villages where children reside.

11. The two cases from Afghanistan are different in that they were developed under extreme circumstances. From 1979 through 2002, Afghanistan was in a near constant state of war. Education was further curtailed by five years of Taliban active repression of schooling for girls. The models for delivering education developed by CARE and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) had not only to deal with the ravages of war, but also, to include girls, had to work within the strict religious edicts governing girls' and women's behavior. The notion of home-based schools, where students are assembled in the home of a trusted member of the community, was a response to this situation.

12. The program in Honduras is different in that it targets older drop outs. Initial access in Honduras is fairly universal, but drop out is very high. Educator's shortened version of the primary cycle offered in a variety of settings (community centers, work places, churches, etc) allows older students to return to school and obtain primary completion. The program also offers lower secondary education.

13. In Zambia, communities began forming schools in part as a response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the fiscal crisis constraining government services during the 1990s. Communities started their own schools in the absence of a nearby government school and in order to help families unable to meet the costs associated with government schooling. Often this means families impacted by HIV/AIDS. Orphans make up almost one third of the enrollment in these community-based schools.

14. All of these programs involve NGO and/or external funder support. They all also involve government support in one form or another. The amounts of external support and government support vary considerably across the cases. The government of Honduras paid a percentage of the cost of the Educator's program. In Egypt, the government pays community school teacher salaries. The government in Mali did take on payment of community school teachers for a few years as part of a negotiated forgiveness of debt. In the other cases, the government may contribute some curriculum materials for schools, or may include schools in the official system of supervision and support. In Zambia, government grants-in-aid have been made available to community schools, but most schools rely almost exclusively on community, NGO or faith-based support. The programs in Afghanistan rely entirely on NGO and community input.

15. All of the programs rely on community support. In almost all cases this involves hiring and payment of teachers (cash or in-kind) and management and upkeep of the school. Resources are generated through small fees or through broader community-wide contributions to the school. For example, school management committees in Mali raised as much as \$159 per school from community-based contributions and fees (Annuaire statistique des programmes éducation et santé et nutrition scolaire du cercle de Kolondieba, 2003-04).

## 4. IMPLICATIONS OF COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR ACHIEVING EFA

16. National education systems in most countries provide primary education to the great majority of school-aged children. However, in most developing countries, the national system fails to reach populations that can be characterized as historically underserved. The vast majority of the 130 million children who do not go to school, live in rural areas (Report Of The Ministerial Seminar On Education For Rural People In Africa, FAO-UNESCO/IIEP-ADEA Seminar, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 7-9 September 2005). In 85 countries, the disparity between rural and urban enrollment is greater than the gap between girls and boys. Analysis of sub-national data indicate that many of those rural areas within developing countries have low access to almost all services (health, education, sanitation, etc.). Regarding school attendance, these underserved rural areas have enrollment that is dramatically lower than national averages (Wils, Looking below the Surface: Reaching the out-of-school Children, 2005).

17. The 2004 *World Development Report* summed up this problem of underserved areas in developing countries thusly, “Too often [government] services fail poor people. They are often inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. But even when accessible, they are often dysfunctional, extremely low in quality, and unresponsive to the needs of a diverse clientele” (World Development Report, 2004: 19). The goals of education for all cannot be met by simply investing in the expansion of the regular public system without considering how best to organize schools that respond to the particular needs of a country’s most disadvantaged families and children. The most significant implication coming out of this analysis of various complementary education programs is that these programs demonstrate how to design and implement education strategies that can meet the needs of those families and children.

18. In each of the eight cases reviewed in this study, non-governmental actors have been able to work with communities to:

- Create schools that are located in the villages where families live, making it easier for children, especially girls, to enroll in school and attend regularly
- Set up community-based management structures that are able to effectively oversee the day-to-day operations of their schools; assuring student and teacher attendance, setting the calendar and schedule, collecting contributions, paying teachers, etc.
- Develop a local-language based curriculum that often simplifies and focuses the national curriculum, supported with materials and instructional strategies that, where possible, relate to the local/regional context and issues
- Identify, recruit and hire teachers from within the community
- Support those teachers either monetarily or through in-kind contributions and provide ongoing community engagement in assuring the success of the school
- Provide regular support and ongoing training for teachers and community-based school management committees

19. What these programs demonstrate is that to reach underserved populations, governments need to reconsider several facets of how they organize the supply of education. Specifically, complementary education programs hold important lessons in terms of where to locate schools, how big schools should be, how schools should be managed and by whom, how to ensure an adequate supply of teachers, and, in some cases, how to improve curriculum and instruction.

## 4.1. Location and size of school

20. Most governments develop their education systems with an eye towards maximizing efficiency in the placement of schools. School mapping exercises attempt to locate a standard, usually six grade, rural school in an area that can draw from several villages to realize an enrollment of hundreds of children. The lesson from complementary models is that distance to school is a significant barrier to access, especially for girls. This was the case in Northern Ghana, Upper Egypt, Bangladesh, Zambia, Mali, and Afghanistan. Rural populations under-enroll in regular public schools because children –especially girls– who live more than a reasonable walking distance from school, will simply not attend.<sup>1</sup> What the complementary models in this study have done is re-conceive of primary school as a village-based institution. This means a smaller school, often one designed to recruit the available cohort of school-aged children and move them through the primary grades. Because the complementary models establish smaller schools, they are able to have smaller class sizes and lower student to teacher ratios, usually around 30 to 1. The programs often set small class size targets as specific criteria for supporting a school.

21. For example, in the mid-1990s, girls' enrollment in the rural hamlets of Upper Egypt was estimated to be as low as 15%. One reason families gave for not enrolling their daughters was the distance they would have to walk to the nearest school. The UNICEF community school project was therefore designed to target small hamlets with at least 50 out of school children. A community school would enroll a multi-age cohort of students together, but limit the class size to 30 students. Facilitators were specifically trained to organize learning activities tailored to the different levels and ages of those 30 children.

## 4.2. Governance and decision-making

22. For years governments have struggled with how to mandate, entice or facilitate increased community participation in public schools. Many countries require schools to have parent associations or insist that communities contribute to the construction of a government school. The complementary education programs reviewed in this study have turned the notion of community participation on its head. Rather than trying to enlist community support for a government school, these programs help communities establish their own schools.

23. Through the work of local and international NGOs, communities are helped to reach the decision to establish a school. Specific criteria are usually enforced – the community has to set up a management committee that includes certain membership, the community has to participate in an exercise to identify likely students and potential teachers, they have to offer a place where the school can meet, or contribute to the construction of a new building. In this manner, from the beginning, the community sees the school as belonging to them. NGOs also provide training and support to the school management committees in setting up systems for enrolling students, reaching decisions about when school should meet, monitoring student and teacher attendance, determining fees or in-kind contributions to generate resources to pay teachers, etc. Not all community-based management committees function well, but complementary programs have shown that with ongoing support and training, communities can be helped to set up democratic approaches to school-based decision-making.

24. In Mali, Save the Children or one of its partner local NGOs would identify villages that did not have public schools and that expressed an interest in starting a community school. The village leaders were asked to designate a five-member school management committee. This committee was required to compile a list of children to enroll, set and collect the school fees, identify and recruit teacher candidates, and enroll an equal number of boys and girls. One of the NGOs would then

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<sup>1</sup> For example, research by the World Bank's Rural Access Initiative in West and Central Africa revealed that enrollment drops off considerably when a child's distance to school exceeds 1 kilometer.

provide training for the school management committee and support the processes of teacher and student identification, as well as facilitate the formal relationship between the community school and the local education authority. The community school would become official when it submitted a declaration of opening to the local authorities, following guidelines developed jointly by NGOs and the Ministry of Education.

### 4.3. Language of instruction and curriculum

25. Many complementary education programs make use of local language instruction and a modified version of the recognized national curriculum as strategies for improving access, completion and learning. Among the cases included in this study, Ghana, Mali and Zambia make use of local language instruction (at least in the early primary grades). The others use the regional languages of their countries which are more widely spoken. Part of what makes it possible to use locally recruited teachers is the fact that instruction takes place in a local or regional language. Teachers with less formal education can only be helped to deliver instruction in a language which they already speak.

26. Use of local language necessitates, at a minimum, adaptation of curriculum and materials to that language. Programs in Ghana and Mali have done this. Curricula in the complementary programs in Ghana, Mali and Egypt have also been modified to reduce the number of subjects covered and to incorporate relevant subject matter for the local population.

27. In Egypt's community schools, the curriculum was modified primarily to accommodate a decidedly different view of the learning relationship between teachers and students and to enable multiage teaching. A typical classroom in a community school in Upper Egypt would have students spending a significant portion of the day working individually or in small groups in self-planned projects. The classrooms are organized into "learning corners" each outfitted with a variety of stimulating learning materials – pictures, books, puzzles, games, picture cards, materials from the village, displays of the children's own work, learning challenge tasks developed by the facilitators, etc.

28. In Ghana and Honduras, the curricula are modified to make it possible to cover a portion of the primary cycle in less time. School for Life covers the equivalent of the first three years of primary school in a nine month program, and Educadodos completes the six grades of the primary cycle in three years. In Zambia the Skills, Participation and Access to Relevant Knowledge (SPARK) was developed as an alternative curriculum for accelerated learning, designed for students who enter school at an older age. It compresses the seven grades of basic education into four years. However, since the SPARK curriculum is not examinable, over time, community schools have moved away from it and have begun following the national curriculum. A similar evolution took place in Mali as well – as community schools became better established, parents wanted them to conform more directly to the national curriculum, enabling their children to transition into government schools in order to continue their education.

29. Another example of curriculum modification can be found in the case of the home-based schools supported by the International Rescue Committee in Afghanistan. Many Afghan teachers and students have experienced violent conflict. All are now living with the social, economic and political uncertainties of the transition to peace. In such contexts, attending school has to do more than help children to read and write; school has to provide a conducive and comfortable environment in which students can thrive, can develop self confidence, ambition and ideas for the future, and can also gain the attitudes and skills necessary to live peacefully with one another. An important dimension of the home-based schools curriculum is therefore promoting the psychosocial well-being of students. The teaching methods and activities used by the teachers are specifically designed to foster the well-being of the children they work with.

30. In Mali, Bangladesh, and Zambia, community-based schools were launched as less formal alternatives to regular public schools. However, the tendency over time in those cases was for the complementary programs to evolve to become more like regular schools – in terms of the curriculum followed and in terms of their preparation of students for further years of education.

## 4.4. Teachers, teacher training and support

31. The biggest bottleneck faced by governments in trying to achieve EFA is the supply of teachers. Governments are not able to produce sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, to assign them to the remote areas where they are needed, and meet the higher wage bill implied by a dramatic expansion of the teaching force. Here again, complementary education models have overcome this bottleneck by taking a decidedly different approach to teacher supply.

32. All of the complementary education programs rely on the premise that individuals capable of teaching primary school reside in or near each village. Those individuals need initial training, and certainly need regular support to be pedagogically effective. However, they have distinct advantages. They live where the schools are and therefore do not need to be enticed to accept a posting to a remote area. They know the children and families and are in fact selected by the communities to be teachers because they are known and trusted. They are hired by the community and therefore directly answerable to people with whom they have pre-existing relationships. They often recognize their limitations and are more receptive to the training and support offered by the complementary education programs. They are willing to work for much less compensation, and in many cases are volunteers. The complementary education programs in this study all work with less qualified, locally recruited teachers. Table 4.1 below shows the average level of education, the nature of their employment, and whether they are afforded some form of official status as teachers.

33. Since these programs all rely on less educated and minimally compensated teachers, they also all make use of regular training and support. In principle, government systems of education provide ongoing training and supervision/support for teachers. However, regional or district education support personnel rarely if ever get out to visit all the schools in their jurisdictions, especially those in the most remote parts of the country. The complementary education programs ensure that all teachers, once they are recruited:

- Receive an initial training, usually of a few weeks duration prior to the start of school
- Are visited regularly –in many cases weekly– by field staff or by a more senior teacher
- Are enrolled in follow up training during the year and/or at the end of the school year

Table 4.1: Complementary Education Program Teachers

| Program           | Level of Education                                     | Nature of Employment  | Official Status |
|-------------------|--|---|-----------------|
| Afghanistan: COPE | grade 12   | paid by community   | No              |
| Afghanistan: IRC  | some secondary   | paid by community   | No              |
| BRAC              | some secondary   | paid by community   | No              |
| Egypt             | some secondary   | paid by government  | Yes             |
| Ghana             | elementary, some secondary                             | Volunteer<br>(with small stipend)                                     | No              |
| Honduras          | some secondary<br>(usually graduates of<br>Educatodos) | Volunteer<br>(with some compensation)                                 | No              |
| Mali              | elementary, some secondary                             | Paid by community<br>(paid by government during a<br>few year period) | No              |
| Zambia            | some secondary   | Volunteer<br>(with some in-kind<br>compensation)                      | No              |

34. What they lack in resources for compensating teachers, these programs make up for in resources devoted to providing an extensive on-the-ground network of teacher and school support and supervision. In both programs in Afghanistan, and in Egypt, Ghana, and Mali, schools are visited at least once a month by teacher support staff who observe instruction and provide immediate, on-the-spot feedback and professional development. In Bangladesh, BRAC program officers visit schools as frequently as twice a week.

35. Because they use teachers without official qualifications, and often with low levels of education, it is tempting to dismiss the education offered in these community-based schools as inferior in quality. The next section of this paper shows that in fact these complementary schools are often able to produce better educational outcomes than government schools. And they do so while serving the most disadvantaged populations.

## 5. SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

36. For the purposes of this study, effectiveness corresponds to the three principal EFA goals: access, completion and learning. Each case was examined to see how effectively it provides access for the populations it targets, how well it ensures completion of primary school for the children that do enroll, and, where data permit, whether students demonstrate levels of learning at least commensurate with those achieved in government schools.

37. In terms of access, some programs significantly augment access overall in the country, and in particular for target areas (remote rural parts of a country). This includes Afghanistan-COPE, BRAC, Mali and Zambia. Other programs are small in scale, but have significant impact in the areas where they work or for the populations they target, i.e. Egypt, Ghana, Honduras and the IRC program in Afghanistan. In these cases the community schools are launched in villages where there is essentially no access to education. In Ghana and Egypt, the programs work to systematically enroll all the school-age children in a village.

38. Regarding completion, data are available for eight of the cases included in this study, and in all but one, the completion rates in the community-based schools meet or surpass those achieved on average in formal public schools. Data on learning were harder to obtain. Some measure of learning is available for all cases, however in some the data for complementary programs and public schools are not comparable. For BRAC, Egypt, Honduras,<sup>2</sup> Mali and Zambia it is possible to directly compare complementary education and regular public school students' results. For the programs in Afghanistan and for Ghana it is only possible to show results for complementary education students. At the time of this research, some data on student performance at the end of the primary cycle in regular public schools in Ghana were available, and provided an estimate of learning that was compared to the data from the School for Life program.

39. While often serving the most disfavored families in a country, community-based schools are demonstrating that they can produce results comparable to or better than those obtained in regular public schools. Take the example of community schools in Zambia. The households of community school students are poorer and less educated than those of students attending regular public schools. Less than a third of community school families live in permanent structures compared to 46 percent of public school families. Students attending rural community schools are 13 percent more likely than students in rural government schools to report never having breakfast before school. Urban community school students are almost 2.5 times as likely to report never having breakfast as their public school counterparts. Community school families have on average less education than the families of students enrolled in government schools and community schools students are more likely to speak only a local language at home (Kenyika et al, Zambia's National Assessment Survey Report, 2005).

40. While serving these most disadvantaged families (many suffering under the impact of HIV/AIDS – one third of community school students are orphaned and vulnerable), and doing so with less qualified teachers and with fewer resources than regular public schools, community schools in Zambia are outperforming regular public schools in both English and Math as measured by the Examination Council of Zambia's national assessment.

41. The following table provides a summary of the effectiveness of the eight programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Comparable data on student performance are only available for the grade 7-9 program of Educatodos in Honduras.

Table 5.1: Complementary Education Program Effectiveness — Promoting Access, Completion and Learning

| Program                 | Access   | Completion                     | Learning  |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Afgh: COPE <sup>3</sup> | In 6 provinces, provided 9% of the enrollment in 2003. In 2001, provide the only access for girls.           | COPE: 50%<br>Public: 32%       | % passing end of year<br>COPE: 94%                            |
| Afgh: IRC               | Where located, provides the only access to education, especially for girls                                   | IRC: 68%<br>Public: 32%        | % passing end of year<br>IRC: 99%                             |
| Bangladesh              | Accounts for 8% of national enrollment. May account for over 50% of the total enrollment in rural areas      | BRAC: 94%<br>Public: 67%       | % passing basic competencies<br>BRAC: 70%<br>Gov't: 27%       |
| Egypt                   | Where located, provides the only access to education, especially for girls                                   | CS: 92%<br>Public: 90%         | % passing 5 <sup>th</sup> grade exam<br>CS: 94%<br>Gov't: 73% |
| Ghana <sup>4</sup>      | Raises the enrollment rate for grades 1-3 in Northern Region from 69% to 83%                                 | SFL: 91%<br>Public: 59%        | % meeting minimum standards<br>SFL: 81%                       |
| Honduras <sup>5</sup>   | Over life of program, served about 30% of out-of-school population   | Educadores: 61%<br>Public: 68% | % passing basic competency<br>Educadores: 63%<br>Gov't: 62%   |
| Mali                    | Increased the enrollment rate in Sikasso from 35% to 62%   | CS: 67%<br>Public: 56%         | % passing CEP exam<br>CS: 51%<br>Gov't: 43%                   |
| Zambia <sup>6</sup>     | Increases national enrollment by 25%. As many as 30% of community school students are orphaned or vulnerable | CS: 72%<br>Public: 72%         | % meeting minimum standard<br>CS: 40%<br>Gov't: 35%           |

42. In both programs in Afghanistan, as well as in BRAC, Egypt, Ghana and Mali, the complementary education programs achieve completion rates that surpass those of the formal public schools in each country. In Zambia, it was not possible to disaggregate government and community schools, and in Honduras, public schools had completion rates higher than the complementary education program.

43. In Bangladesh, Egypt, Honduras, Mali and Zambia, it is possible to compare learning outcomes of community and public schools using available data from a single measure for both categories of schools. In Bangladesh, Honduras and Zambia community and public school students sit for a same exam that measures learning in core subjects against an objective benchmark. In Bangladesh a much higher percentage of BRAC students than government students meet the benchmarks for basic competencies in all subjects – 70 percent compared to 27 percent. In Zambia, 40 percent of community school students meet minimum standards in reading compared to 35 percent of government school students. In Mali and Egypt, pass rates on the end of primary cycle examination for community school students are higher than for regular public school students.

44. Detailed analyses of the measures of effectiveness for each program are presented in the specific cases studies also being published this year by USAID's Education Quality Improvement Program.

<sup>3</sup> In both programs in Afghanistan data are not available for regular public schools. The end of year exams reported for the complementary programs are teacher administered tests. While these are not good objective measures of student performance, they do provide some indication of how students are doing in those schools.

<sup>4</sup> For Ghana, data concern grades 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> For Honduras, the completion data are for grades 1-6, learning data are for grades 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> In Zambia, a national completion rate of 72% is reported, which includes both government and community schools. Since it was not possible to disaggregate the contributions of government and community schools, 72% is used for both.



## 6. COST-EFFECTIVENESS

45. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 summarize the cost-effectiveness analysis conducted for each of the case studies. The objective in each case was to develop a method for comparing the cost-effectiveness of a complementary model to the cost-effectiveness of regular public schools. Data were gathered to permit a calculation of the annual recurrent cost for enrolling one student. This was usually done by taking an aggregated accounting of recurrent costs for the complementary education project and for government and then dividing each by the respective numbers of students. For the complementary education programs development costs associated with the start up of a project or program are included, but capital costs for construction are excluded from both government and complementary program cost data. With estimates of the unit recurrent costs it is then possible to estimate a cost per student completing a given number of years (multiplying the unit cost by the number of years and dividing by the completion rate). It is also possible, when measures of learning are available, to calculate a cost per learning outcome (by dividing the cost per completer by the percentage of students achieving the desired outcome).

46. This analysis is not intended to permit any cross-country comparisons. Rather it is meant only to indicate within each country the cost-effectiveness of both regular public and complementary education programs. What the analysis does show fairly consistently is that the complementary education models studies are effective at reaching underserved populations, and are in fact more cost-effective in terms of the amounts of completion and learning achieved for the resources spent.

47. In the IRC program in Afghanistan, and in Egypt, Bangladesh, Honduras, and Zambia unit recurrent costs are lower in the community schools than in the regular public schools in the same country. In Ghana, Mali, and the COPE project in Afghanistan, the annual unit costs of the complementary education programs are actually higher than government costs. In Ghana and Afghanistan, the greater effectiveness of those programs usually makes up for the difference in unit costs. In the cases where the data permits comparisons, except Mali, complementary programs are more cost-effective at producing completers and are more cost-effective at producing desired levels of learning than the regular public schools in each country.

48. The complementary education models studied are more cost-effective because usually they attain higher rates of completion and learning. In other words they tend to be more educationally effective than regular public schools (as evidenced by the data on completion and learning presented in the previous section). For example, all the models except for Honduras and Zambia have higher completion rates than comparable public schools. For the cases where data are available to show student learning for both public schools and complementary models, the models outperform the public schools on the same measure of learning – often by a lot, and always while serving significantly more disadvantage students and doing so with less qualified teachers.

49. In two cases, increased cost-effectiveness also derives in part from a “short-cut” approach to the primary cycle. The School for Life in Ghana condenses three years of primary school into 9 months. Educatodos in Honduras covers six years of primary school in three years. BRAC primary schools and community schools in Zambia also started out covering the full primary cycle in less than the proscribed number of years, but later came to emulate their respective official cycles.

Table 6.1: Cost-effectiveness of Complementary Models and Public Schools

| Afghanistan – COPE |  | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|--------------------|--|-------------------|----------------|
|                    | Annual per pupil cost  | \$38              | \$31           |
|                    | <i>Completion rate</i>                                       | 50%               | 32%            |
|                    | Cost per completer   | \$453             | \$485          |
|                    | <i>Percent of students passing end of year exam</i>          | 94%               | --             |
|                    | Cost per learning outcome                                    | \$482             | --             |
| Afghanistan – IRC  |  | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|                    | Annual per pupil cost  | \$18              | \$31           |
|                    | <i>Completion rate</i>                                       | 68%               | 32%            |
|                    | Cost per completer   | \$132             | \$485          |
|                    | <i>Percent of students passing end of year exam</i>          | 99%               | --             |
|                    | Cost per learning outcome                                    | \$134             | --             |
| Bangladesh – BRAC  |  | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|                    | Annual per pupil cost  | \$20              | \$29           |
|                    | <i>Completion rate</i>                                       | 94%               | 67%            |
|                    | Cost per completer   | \$84              | \$246          |
|                    | <i>Percent of students meeting basic competencies</i>        | 70%               | 27%            |
|                    | Cost per learning outcome                                    | \$120             | \$911          |
| Egypt – UNICEF     |  | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|                    | Annual per pupil cost  | \$114             | \$164          |
|                    | <i>Completion rate</i>                                       | 92%               | 90%            |
|                    | Cost per completer   | \$620             | \$911          |
|                    | <i>Percent of students passing the 5th grade examination</i> | 94%               | 73%            |
|                    | Cost per learning outcome                                    | \$659             | \$1,248        |

Table 6.2: Cost-effectiveness of Complementary Models and Public Schools

| Ghana – School for Life   | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|---|-------------------|----------------|
| Annual per pupil cost   | \$39              | \$27           |
| Completion rate   | 91%               | 59%            |
| Cost per completer (grade 3)                                    | \$43              | \$135          |
| Percent of students meeting standards for literacy <sup>7</sup> | 81%               | 9%             |
| Cost per learning outcome                                       | \$53              | \$1,500        |

  

| Honduras – Educatodos     | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Annual per pupil cost     | \$40              | \$102          |
| Completion rate           | 61%               | 68%            |
| Cost per completer        | \$197             | \$803          |
|                           | --                | --             |
| Cost per learning outcome | --                | --             |

  

| Mali – Save the Children            | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Annual per pupil cost               | \$47              | \$30           |
| Completion rate                     | 67%               | 56%            |
| Cost per completer                  | \$421             | \$322          |
| Percent of students passing the CEP | 51%               | 43%            |
| Cost per learning outcome           | \$825             | \$729          |

  

| Zambia – Community Schools                          | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|---|-------------------|----------------|
| Annual per pupil cost                               | \$39              | \$67           |
| Completion rate                                     | 72%               | 72%            |
| Cost per completer                                  | \$376             | \$655          |
| Percent of students meeting the standard in English | 40%               | 35%            |
| Cost per learning outcome                           | \$939             | \$1,873        |

<sup>7</sup> The learning outcomes for public school students in Ghana are based on Criterion Referenced Test (CRT), given to a 10% national sample of students at grade 6 each year and measuring learning performance in language and mathematics. On that test only 8.7% of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students achieved the minimum competency level in English.

## 7. CONCLUSION

50. The eight complementary education programs included in this study are not aberrations. In fact community-based models of primary schooling are a growing, world-wide phenomenon. For example, a quick review of available documentation indicates that at least some 25,000 community-based schools presently serve more than 3.5 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

51. The goals of EFA cannot be realized unless education systems are better able to reach rural, poor children. Assuring not only access, but putting children on a path to completion of primary school and helping them achieve a level of learning that will improve their lives, requires that all schools be much more effective. Not only do students who live in remote areas have less access to school, when schooling is available to them, it is often of poor quality. Models like those analyzed in this study show how countries can better organize schooling in areas usually least served by the formal education system, and also show how different approaches to school organization lead ultimately to greater effectiveness – in terms of the amount of completion and learning the schools are able to generate.

52. Not all complementary education programs are successful, and in those that achieve some success, not all schools are uniform in quality. However, the cases included in this study, and additional ones like them in Colombia, Guatemala, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Uganda included in earlier reviews done by EQUIP, (DeStefano, Meeting EFA: Lessons from Complementary Approaches, 2005), are worth examining because they identify some important lessons for establishing effective schools for underserved populations. In particular, this research enables several questions to be addressed. What factors appear to contribute most to the effectiveness of community based schools? How can public sector plans for achieving EFA take into account the lessons from complementary approaches? What are the long-term implications of community-based approaches to organizing and funding primary schools?

### 7.1 What factors appear to contribute most to the effectiveness of community based schools?

53. As discussed earlier in Section 4, several factors clearly make it possible for these complementary education programs to work effectively at delivering education to underserved populations.

54. First is cooperation with communities to set up schools that are smaller in scale and located in the villages where children live. Placing a school in a village makes it easier for students to attend, especially girls. Once a school is easier for students to get to, then several factors must combine to help make that school more effective at supporting learning. Because the school is set up through a partnership with the community, then community members take more active roles in assuring student and teacher attendance. Regular attendance is part of what improves the likelihood of greater learning and increased persistence in school. For example, daily attendance rates in School for Life in Ghana are reported at above 90 percent, while surveys done by USAID/Ghana in 2002 indicate daily attendance of approximately 75 percent in regular public schools.

55. More students attending school on a regular basis only leads to better outcomes if instruction is occurring during the time they are in school. Field reports from School for Life indicate a very high proportion of total class time is utilized for teacher/learner interaction. Lesson designs focus entirely on building literacy and numeracy skills. In contrast, teacher attendance and time on task in public schools in Ghana (and elsewhere) has been recognized, and documented to be a serious problem. One study examining teacher performance in private and public schools found that less than 75% of school staff were typically at school, and that only about 30% of total school timetable was used for building language and numeracy skills. Teacher absentee rates have been reported to be as

high as 27 percent in Uganda, 25 percent in India, 19 percent in Indonesia and 17 percent in Zambia (Winkler, Public Expenditure Tracking in Education, p. 3, 2005)

56. What enables class time to be used effectively are teachers with adequate training and support. The lesson from the complementary programs reviewed in this study that is most counter-intuitive is that locally recruited teachers with less education can become effective facilitators of learning. It is most critical to recognize that in all the cases, the locally recruited teachers were assisted with regular on-the-job support. Putting under-qualified instructors in front of children will not lead to learning unless those individuals are adequately and frequently supported. All the programs studied made use of networks of well-trained teacher support personnel to visit schools at least once a month, and usually more frequently when a teacher is first employed. Teachers are given initial training and additional intensive training during their first year and on through several years. In Egypt, mentoring relationships and networks are also set up between experienced community-school teachers and those just starting out.

57. Like the locally recruited teachers, communities can effectively manage schools when they are also adequately and frequently supported. Here again the complementary models make use of their networks of on-the-ground staff to provide initial and ongoing training and support to school management committees. Communities are not expected to figure everything out on their own. Well tested models for community mobilization and training are employed to help generate the necessary engagement and set up effective local management structures. Because the complementary education programs all work through non-governmental organizations, they can draw on the comparative advantages which experienced, grassroots NGOs have in doing exactly this kind of work.

58. The prominence of the community's role in setting up and running a school, the reliance on a broad network of support resources that can frequently reach each school and community, and partnership with non-governmental actors to establish on-the-ground networks of support services, all imply an inherently decentralized approach to providing education. Reaching underserved populations with effective education is going to take genuine decentralization –not just movement of administrative functions to lower levels of the education system, but more purposeful partnerships with NGOs and local communities. Genuine local control and structured approaches to local decision making are part of what enable community-based schools to be effective.

## **7.2 How can public sector plans for achieving EFA take into account the lessons from complementary approaches?**

59. In addition to supporting the kind of inherently decentralized approaches to provision of primary education mentioned above, governments can proactively work with complementary education programs. The public sector can take advantage of the success of complementary approaches in three ways :

- Government can provide resources and support for NGO initiated complementary programs
- Lessons from complementary approaches can be applied directly to government efforts to more effectively reach underserved areas and populations
- Government can seek out and support partnerships with NGOs implementing complementary education programs

60. Table 7.1 below summarizes some of the ways in which the complementary education programs included in this study collaborate with the government in each country, as well as indicating the types of direct support different programs may receive from the government in their respective settings.

Table 7.1 : Collaboration with and Support from Government

| Program            | Collaboration with Government  | Government Support   |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Afghanistan – COPE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> <li>COPE also facilitates capacity building activities for MOE staff and teachers</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community schools being progressively converted to official public schools with COPE continuing to open new schools in remote areas.</li> </ul>       |
| Afghanistan – IRC  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home-based schools being progressively converted to official public schools</li> </ul>  |
| BRAC               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> <li>Coordination unit created to improve relations between BRAC and government</li> </ul>   |
| Egypt              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program designed jointly</li> <li>Curriculum developed with government institutions</li> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pays teacher salaries</li> <li>Provides books and materials</li> <li>Applies lessons from community schools to other programs and projects</li> </ul> |
| Ghana              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides testing of students</li> <li>Provides access to distance learning for locally recruited teachers</li> </ul>                                  |
| Honduras           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program developed with government</li> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government paid portion of program costs</li> </ul>   |
| Mali               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local education authorities provide some oversight and support</li> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government promotion of community schools</li> <li>Salaries paid during a short period as part of a debt forgiveness program</li> </ul>               |
| Zambia             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students officially recognized and able to transfer to regular public schools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secretariat created to oversee development of community schools</li> <li>Some grants-in-aid for community schools</li> </ul>                          |

61. Egypt is an example where the government both provided direct support to a complementary education program and worked to apply the lessons learned from the project on a broader scale in the public sector. The government worked in partnership with UNICEF from the beginning of the community school program. The ministry of education demonstrated its support by agreeing to pay the salaries of community school teachers, provide school books and teachers guides, contribute to the development of curriculum and teacher training programs, and assure school feeding at community schools. UNICEF designed the model of community education, provided training for

program staff and ensured management and ongoing support through its partnerships with local NGOs.

62. By agreeing to collaborate fully with the project, and by assuring from the beginning its financial and institutional contribution to the program, the Egyptian government effectively cleared space in the educational landscape for this experiment in community-based schooling. And the success of the community school initiative in turn triggered and facilitated an informed education sector dialogue during the last decade in Egypt. Lessons learned have not only included how to effectively provide education to physically remote children (especially girls), but also how to foster and make effective use of community participation and engage students, teachers and communities in ongoing, active learning and democratic decision-making.

63. The complementary education program in Egypt was recognized as a “seed bed” for reform, rather than a “scaleable” operation. This meant that the emphasis from the beginning was on learning what worked and then setting up the means to apply it in other initiatives and efforts as a way to expand the impact, rather than spread the project itself (Zalouk, *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*, 2004).

64. Uganda presents another case where government has put in place specific policies to support the development of complementary education programs and to lend financial and institutional support to their implementation. Through explicit memoranda of understanding, Save the Children has agreed to support and develop existing community schools – providing training to headteachers, teachers and school management committees, and providing materials and supervision. District education offices for their part have agreed to assure the recurrent costs of the community schools, such as teacher salaries and textbooks. The districts also participate in the supervision and annual evaluation of these schools, and the Save the Children project sponsors an annual education forum within the district to share information on achievements and developments.

65. Ghana and Ethiopia are cases where the government has deliberately looked to complementary education programs for lessons that could be applied in the public sector.

66. The Ministry of Education in Ethiopia launched its own study of non-formal, complementary education models to better understand the means through which they reach underserved populations with education of acceptable quality and cost. Based on the results of this study, the Government included support for non-formal, complementary education within its education sector development plan. One policy provision in that plan stated that different modes for delivering primary education will be practiced in order to promote education in regions where gross enrollment rates are lowest and the populations are nomadic. Furthermore, the government’s sector plan made a commitment to strengthen community-driven school based management, including creating mechanisms through which communities can voluntarily take part in the financing of schools. In addition, the ministry put forth a national directive permitting the transfer of pupils from what are called *Alternative Basic Education Centers* to regular public schools. The NGO community in Ethiopia has formed the Basic Education Association which works with government and multiple donors in the design, promotion and financing of complementary basic education, including utilizing block grants from the government to support efforts at the local level.

67. In Ghana, the national government has issued directives to districts to cooperate with providers of complementary education. As a result, district directors of education and circuit supervisors work with the complementary education providers to locate community-based schools, train and supervise voluntary teachers, and assess student learning. The district education office conducts an assessment of all pupils at the end of the program. Pupils who complete the complementary education program, and who pass the end of program examination, are admitted into grade four of regular public schools. A key policy initiative included in the government’s education sector plan is to support volunteer teacher programs in rural areas, with an emphasis on local recruitment (especially of female teachers). For example, volunteer teachers in complementary education programs are granted access to distance learning that can lead to formal certification. With donor support the ministry is also developing and implementing a program of training modules that

lead to certification for volunteer teachers, and which affords them the option to apply for positions within the teacher service.

### **7.3 What are the long-term implications of community-based approaches to organizing and funding primary schools?**

68. Governments can build on the work of complementary education programs in the ways described above. However, several longer-term issues do need to be taken into account when considering how best to promote, support and sustain complementary programs' contributions to achieving EFA.

69. While the complementary education programs included in this study exhibit educational outcomes that meet or exceed those obtained in regular public schools in each of their respective countries, none of the programs would be help up as examples of educational excellence. What the programs are designed to do is assure a minimum standard of quality to populations who otherwise are, at best, poorly served or, at worst, not served at all. A longer-term consideration has to be how the quality of these schools can be progressively improved over time. What investments will best improve the quality of community-based schooling without inadvertently undermining the very factors that contribute to their success in the first place? For example, additional training and support for locally recruited teachers cannot sever their connections to the communities that are a big part of what enables them to have some success. Also, introduction of additional resources (which most rural schools could benefit from) cannot lead to a dissolution of local control.

70. This last issue is perhaps the most critical concern for the long-term sustainability of complementary education programs. At some point, programs that rely on community contributions and/or voluntary effort to assure provision of basic education cannot exist alongside regular government schools that are supported through ongoing allocation of public resources. If one set students and families receive education that is publicly funded, while another set (usually the already least favored and most underserved segment of the country's population) must rely on their own resources to obtain education, then the system is dualistic and inherently inequitable. The whole idea of targeting underserved populations in the first place is to promote greater equity in access to and success in education. If that targeting requires those populations to make financial contributions that other more favored groups are not asked to make, then the equity objective is in fact subverted. Therefore, governments must devise methods through which public resources can be made available to complementary education programs (as is in the examples of Egypt, Ethiopia and Uganda cited above).

71. How resources get transferred to complementary education programs matters as much as whether they do or not. For example, some of the complementary education centers in Uganda have been financed by government, which has paid teacher salaries and provided instructional materials. However, it has been noted that once government takes over the payment of salaries, the elements that make the alternative schools work well – local teachers selected by the community, shorter school days, regular supervision, small class sizes, community oversight – tend to be replaced by more formal procedures typical of government-run schools. Government cannot take over the decision-making best left to community-based school management committees simply because resources are now being transferred from the state to the local level. In fact, mechanisms such as block grants or grants-in-aid may be most effective for funneling resources to community schools without usurping local decision-making, because they imply the local decision-makers are given the resources without specific dictates about how the resources can or cannot be used.

72. Furthermore, when government does get more formally involved in supporting complementary education efforts, it is not given that existing administrative structures can assume the institutional responsibilities usually handled by non-governmental organizations. The capacities required to mobilize and support communities in forming school management committees and to

regularly support those communities and the teachers they select are not ones that most education systems demonstrate. Part of what enable the complementary education programs in this study to succeed are the capabilities that the non-governmental organizations bring to the table as implementors of these programs. One cannot assume that government structures have, or even can develop, those capabilities. Furthermore, to assemble the manpower needed to staff an on-the-ground network of community and school support services may surpass the institutional and financial capacity of the public sector. NGOs may in fact be able to deploy field staff at lower costs than the public sector. At a minimum, in the cases included in this study, the NGOs demonstrated that they were able to effectively deploy the necessary networks of support personnel in ways that did not ruin the cost-effectiveness of the complementary education programs.

73. The factors that most contribute to the success of the kinds of complementary programs reviewed in this study can be summarized as including :

- Smaller schools established in collaboration with communities
- Locally recruited teachers supported through ongoing, regular supervision and training
- School-based decision-making and community-based management and governance
- Simplified curriculum and increased instructional time devoted to basic literacy and numeracy

74. An attempt to more broadly promote or adopt complementary programs needs to consider how best to assure these (and any other) conditions that will increase the likelihood of success of the program. It is not enough to try and simply replicate the idea of community-based schools. Governments and their partners must invest the financial and institutional resources necessary to ensure that the conditions most favorable to success of those schools can be assembled and sustained. This implies drawing capacity from where it can best be found – asking government institutions to do what they do well, relying on NGO partners to do what they do best, and allowing communities to assume responsibility for what they can best manage.

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