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**Implementation Matters:  
Exploring their Critical Role in Transforming Policies  
and Investments into Results**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>ADEA</b>	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
<b>BESSIP</b>	Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Program
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>ESIP</b>	Education Sector Investment Program (Uganda)
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>LGRP</b>	Local Government Reform Program
<b>NGO</b>	Non Gouvernemental Organisation
<b>PASE</b>	Programme d'ajustement structurel de l'Education
<b>PREP</b>	Primary Education Reform Program (Ghana)
<b>TDMP</b>	Teacher Development and Management Plan
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>USAID</b>	US Agency for International Development

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This paper examines the proposition that “policy is as implementation does” i.e., that the real, practical meanings of policies are to be found in the outcomes and processes of implementation. For this, the study is based on an in-depth review of periodic implementation review reports (annual, mid-term, end-of-project) and inter-agency background papers on education development programs from eleven countries (Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia). The paper examines patterns of achievement as well as challenges facing these educational systems, especially as they relate to quality and access.

2. The country programs reviewed focus on policies in the areas of: improving teacher performance and motivation; increased levels of educational materials; facilitating access for girls and rural children; increasing parent/community participation in schools; and introducing more participative pedagogical approaches. The reviews indicate that the implementation of these policies often met with considerable resistance due to a combination of factors including: lack of adequate responsiveness of the educational sector to external demands, mainly from the economic sector; opposition within education itself to the proposed policies; lack of adequate time and limited financial resources to implement the policies; inadequate program monitoring and assessment; capacity insufficiencies due to expectations that several demanding policy objectives will be addressed simultaneously; and difficulties arising from outside of the education sector.

3. Because of these shortfalls, not all countries met their policy targets. The needs of the most needy (adults, out-of-school children, girls, children from rural poor families and urban slums, etc.) were incompletely addressed. The syndrome of “teachers without schools and schools without teachers” persisted. Despite considerable resources spent on education, learning achievement was reported low in several countries. Curricular and teaching practices hardly improved in the classroom.

4. A close analysis reveals that many of the problems came from two sources: (i) from pressures created by scarce resources, limited institutional and human capacities, and little participation in the policymaking processes of those charged with implementing the policies. For example, on several occasions, finance ministries found themselves in a bind between revenues shortfalls, austere IMF commitments to restrict expenditures, and the need for adequate funding for education; and (ii) inadequate capacities to manage complex situations. As a result, educational budgets were often not approved, and if approved, not disbursed, or disbursed too late, or disbursements were insufficient.

5. In several cases, the reviews outline appropriate policy decisions made to address these problems. They focus on: streamlining management practices; further decentralizing; improving audits; improved budget processes; and greater involvement of civil society in education decision making.

6. The paper identifies disconnects between the policymaking processes and the realities of implementation. To a large extent, this is happening between the centralized authorities (sometimes with their external partners) and the myriad actors in the field, including parents, teachers, and the learners

7. The paper concludes with a number of propositions that may help to understand this situation and pave the way for a renewed approach to educational policymaking that integrates the imperatives of implementation:

- Flexibility during implementation is an important policy consideration. The ability for intelligent and informed management to act in function of

evolving situations needs to be encouraged. Responsiveness and adaptability are essential and need to be built into the policies, programs and projects.

- Basic assumptions need to be revisited. Many of the difficulties encountered during implementation reflect assumptions made during the design of the policy, such as the assumption that education policies operate in a stable environment and that decisions made in one set of political conditions will be implemented without much alteration in another. Such assumptions need to integrate the probability of unforeseen change.
- The time gaps between policymaking and implementation need to be reduced. A corollary to this may be that policies should be reviewed more frequently in the light of evidence.
- The very concept of policy merits reconsideration. Policymaking often has a large political component, which means trade-offs, compromises and vagueness to gain consensus and political legitimacy. What may be appropriate during the policy formulation phase however may turn out to be a source of difficulty during implementation.
- Thought should be given to the functions of education policies and why they are even formulated. Without clarity on these issues, there is a potential for confusion around the very functions of policies and policymaking, and the roles of the actors in these processes. Such confusion may detract from capacities for implementation.
- Greater participation of all stakeholders should be emphasized. Education systems are complex, with a tendency towards chaos – they do not easily respond as expected by policymakers to pressures from the socio-economic context. Greater participation of civil society organizations in decision-making may serve to promote ownership of educational measures dictated by the broader macroeconomic context.
- Cost recovery approaches should be reconsidered. Despite their considerable advantages regarding ownership and sustainability, cost recovery may be difficult to implement in countries characterized by increased poverty. This, however, does not preclude in-kind contributions such as labor for construction..
- Role definitions among partners need to be clarified. Further decentralization, the increased involvement of parents and learners and greater participation of local communities all have consequences regarding the way funds are disbursed, structures are reshaped, and how stakeholders interact. Quality education could be affected by the ways these issues are tackled.

## **What can be done?**

8. The study suggests that we reexamine assumptions concerning the efficacy of policies that do not include well developed, practical strategies for implementation. It also advises further pursuing current efforts aimed at developing capacities (both institutional and human) in Africa. Lastly, it recommends exploring participative approaches to institutional development, focusing on the functional analysis education ministries and the roles and capacities of the many implementers in the public and private sectors.

## 2. FRAMING THE ISSUE

9. The working hypothesis of this study is that implementation matters much more than is generally recognized and may be a major reason for the lack of success of apparently well-conceived policies and investments. Indeed, the “disconnect” between policy and implementation can be such that the practical utility of the former is washed out for lack of the latter. There is, however, little discussion, let alone empirical evidence, in the education policy analysis literature on the importance of implementation<sup>1</sup>. This is the case even in diagnostic studies done in recent years (Mingat 2003; Bruns 2003; World Bank 1988).

10. There are a number of reasons for this state of affairs:

- Implementation matters do not lend themselves to quantification, which is the preferred approach to education policy analysis and planning, fields that have long been dominated by economists. Sociology – organizational sociology, in particular – and management sciences are probably the academic disciplines most useful in understanding implementation;
- Implementation is about process and concerns myriad details and large and small activities/events that are taking place all over the system at times that can be fixed or variable. These activities/events are difficult to apprehend as a whole, and analysis of all this does not fit in well with the (more macro) diagnostic tools generally in use. In other words, education systems are highly complex organizations whose operations border on chaos;<sup>2</sup>
- Implementation is about action and the daily tasks done by so many actors throughout the system;
- It is also about the procedures, rules and regulations that guide and govern their work, and the extent to which they are known by the many actors;
- It is about the information that flows through the system that is, or is not, used by these actors;
- Implementation is about action, it is dynamic, whereas diagnostic studies tend to focus on fixed, historical situations for which data can be collected (Bah-Lalya 1992), and
- Implementation depends on the capacities, abilities, nature and degree of willingness of all the actors to respond to the challenges and expectations that comprise their work.

11. The challenges of attaining EFA by the appointed date of 2015, along with the need to ensure that quality is taken into account, may contribute to bring the spotlight

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<sup>1</sup> The 1993 Biennial of Donors to African Education (ADEA's previous name) focused on implementation (DAE 1994). The orientation was largely one of “donor” funded projects and programs, with emphasis on ownership, initial program design, government capacity, financing and monitoring. Focusing mainly on North America, Fullan (1999) stresses the need for a “theory of action”. At a recent ADEA meeting (June 30 - July 3, 2003), Rosa Maria Torres, then minister of education from Ecuador strongly emphasized the centrality of implementation. Her message, spoken as a seasoned education professional and minister of education, was something to the tune of “implementation is everything”. She even stated that the education minister she then was had yet to benefit from the educational professional (researcher, teacher, theoretician) she has always been.

<sup>2</sup> Fullan (1999:23) makes this point and states that “living on the edge of chaos means getting used to a certain degree of uncertainty.” However, managing this implies solid capacities.

on matters of implementation. Absorptive capacities<sup>3</sup> may be one indicator of implementation capacities. In this respect, we note that, according to UNESCO's 2002 EFA monitoring report (UNESCO 2002: 166-172): (i) "total development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa declined by 14% in real terms, between 1990 and 2000"; (ii) bilateral assistance for education (to all countries) declined by 16% over that period; and (iii) "multilateral aid to education declined sharply over the period from 1990-2000." In addition to this, the UNESCO report suggests that poor absorptive capacities within countries are impediments to effective attainment of EFA goals, as well as a cause of declining aid flows. Although the UNESCO report focuses on planning capacities, in practical terms, the problems are more likely to be found in the domain of management, which is much broader than planning.

12. At issue here are the management capacities (i) to implement education programs and financing, (ii) to control the costs of, for example, teachers and textbooks, and (iii) to have all partners effectively involved, including local communities, the parents and the learners. This third point has everything to do with the development of ownership. Policy makers and managers/planners often address the issues well upstream to implementation. Take, for example, control over the real costs of teachers and textbooks: the number of teachers is poorly understood, meaning that the teacher payroll can go far beyond the number of teachers in classrooms; textbook procurement and distribution is often poorly managed, not to say corrupt. Indeed, corruption can often account for substantial waste and diminish a country's real and perceived absorptive capacities (Chua 1999)<sup>4</sup> Indeed, capacities for effective management require on-the-ground capacities that can deal effectively – often creatively – with all three of these issues.<sup>5</sup>

13. Although it may sound a bit extreme, the proposition "*policy is as implementation does*" merits consideration. What this suggests is that the best-designed policies will get nowhere without capacity and willingness to implement them. However obvious this may appear, it should, nonetheless, be subjected to empirical investigation. Indeed, an interesting thought experiment could be to entertain the question "do policies matter?" The real question, however, is more like "why is it taking us so long to learn the truly capital importance of implementation?"

14. **The objective of this study** is to analyze the difficulties of implementing education sector policies, including the problems linked to insufficient absorptive capacity. There could be any number of reasons for this: (i) lack of technical and/or administrative capacities; (ii) lack of relevant information and poor communications between partners; (iii) lack of full understanding and agreement throughout the system; and (iv) insufficient will to implement the policies, programs and projects; etc. Viewed broadly, the first three points can be seen as elements of an overall capacity for management. The fourth point, of course, is more political. Although not exclusive, the focus is on quality improvement for basic education. The study seeks to draw attention to the need for more effective management of the education system in order to promote strategies for effective implementation of intended policies.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a much-used, rarely defined term. We take it to mean the capacity/ability to get things done, to transform inputs (policy, resources) into actions that lead to desired outcomes.

<sup>4</sup> Corruption may be seen as a result of inadequate controls and mechanisms for accountability – i.e., inadequate managerial capacities, which are part of the absorptive capacities referred to above. On the other hand, one must always keep in mind the importance of political will (including the effectiveness of the legal system) in controlling corruption.

<sup>5</sup> As Fullan (1999) points out, "reform on a large scale depends on *the development of local capacity to manage multiple innovations simultaneously.*" (p. 65; his italics).



### 3. METHODOLOGY

15. This exploratory study focuses on issues relating to policy implementation and absorptive capacity. Our main “field work” or “raw material” consists of periodic implementation review reports (annual, mid-term, end-of-project) and inter-agency background papers on education development programs from eleven countries (Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia). Particular attention is paid to projects and activities that focus on quality improvements. By attempting to get this documentation to “speak for itself”, we seek to identify and analyze patterns of constraints and achievements to address the challenges. Using this documentation, factors hindering implementation are identified. They range from the ways educational policies are formulated to the way they are endorsed and backed-up by wider society, to the way they are actually implemented at various levels, including in the classroom.

16. We recognize that this approach – the use of periodic reviews of project/program implementation – limits us to documenting the experience of the multilateral and bilateral agencies. However, in most cases, the partner governments were full participants in these reviews. Nonetheless, the issue of absorptive capacities<sup>6</sup> is very much at the heart of the international effort and commitment to achieve EFA by 2015.

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, this is usually taken to mean the capacity of governments, education ministries and national systems of education to put “donor” financing to effective and productive use. However, we see this in the broader terms of putting all policy and material resources to productive use. After all, the vast majority of those resources come from national governments.

## 4. DATA SOURCES

17. The main data sources for this investigation are periodic reviews of the implementation of programs conducted in the context of education development assistance programs. Following requests for relevant documentation to the ADEA Secretariat and other partner agencies, the documentary basis for our “field work” was collected mainly by USAID. Several agencies, along with national governments, were involved in these review exercises. This implies that the information contained in these reviews is the product of a consensus that includes government and external financing partners. Table 1, below, provides an overview of the programs covered under this review.

**Table 1 Country programs reviewed**

Country	Programs	Period covered
Benin	CLEF (Children 's Learning and Equity Foundations)	1991-1993
Ethiopia	ESDP II (Education Sector Development Program II)	2002-2005
Ghana	QUIPS (Quality Improvement In Primary Schools)	1997-2001
Guinea	• PASE (Programme d'ajustement Sectoriel de l'Education)	1990-1993
	• PASE 2 (Programme d'ajustement Sectoriel de l'Education-2)	1993-1999
	• FQEL (Fundamental Quality and Equity Levels) • IEQ2 (Improving Educational Quality Project 2)	1999-
Kenya	MPET (Master Plan for Education and Training)	1997-2001
Malawi	GABLE (Girls Attainment in Basic Education and Literacy)	1991-1992
Mali	PISE (Programme d'investissement Sectoriel en Education)	2001-2003
Nigeria	USAID/Nigeria's Education Program	1999-2001
Tanzania	ESDP (Education Sector Development Programme)	2002-2006
Uganda	• BEPS (Basic Education and Policy Support)	2000-2001
	• USAID/Uganda Support for Uganda Primary Education Reform	
	• ESIP (Education Sector Investment Program)	
Zambia	BESSIP (Basic Education Sub Sector Investment Programme)	1996-2003

## 5. OBSERVATIONS

18. The reforms of the immediate post-Jomtien period were characterized by a deliberate effort to streamline education and improve its efficiency in a context of limited resources, increased financial constraints, high demographic growth and limited institutional/human capacities. They paid particular attention to economic matters and to country's commitments to keep expenditures in line with revenues. This was the era of structural adjustment. Most of reform initiatives followed similar paths. Typical educational programs of this period included Guinea PASE (Programme d'ajustement structurel de l'Education), the Zambia BESSIP (Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Program), and the Ghana PREP. These reforms tended to start with a thorough needs assessment, followed by the drafting of orientation papers and Letters of Commitment from countries' central governments. These documents provided the frame and the structures for international support to the education sector, which usually came in the form of comprehensive program packages. The release of funding was linked to a country's fulfillment of "conditionalities" that were sometimes beyond the education sector itself. Regular reviews of the extent to which countries fulfilled these "conditionalities" determined whether or not external funding would continue and to what extent.

19. The documentation from this period indicates that education was "costly and inefficient" with the following characteristics (DeStephano, 1993; Locher, 1997):

- Very limited access, with low enrollment at Grade 1, feeble retention throughout primary education, and high dropout, especially during the last years of primary education. In Tanzania for example, school life expectancy was 6.2 years in 1985, but only 5.5 in 1990 (Government of Tanzania, 2001). In Zambia the same problems were observed as enrollment in Grade 1 declined and GER stagnated (Hebert, 2002).
- Poor quality, with wide variations in efficiency levels according to gender and to location (rural versus urban, from region to region).

20. The documentation provides several reasons for these shortfalls:

- Shortage of adequate facilities (school buildings, adequate classroom and toilet facilities, etc.);
- Poor teacher training;
- Limited availability of educational materials, in particular textbooks;
- Insufficient funding capacities, due to various problems such as high balance of payment deficits, government arrears vis-à-vis funding institutions, financial imbalances at macro level, and the unfavorable context of international markets;
- Poor management of existing resources, with insufficient shares of national budgets allocated to education, insufficient funding of basic education compared to other sectors, and poor allocation of resources within basic education, often with a very high (>90%) proportion of funds allocated to cover wage bills, personnel emoluments, and similar expenses, leaving very little for pedagogical inputs such as teacher training, books, materials, and the like.

21. These shortfalls and others were addressed through a series of interventions. First, comprehensive policy documents were drafted in most countries to formalize basic agreements between development partners and national governments, provide new directions, and set strategies to resolve educational problems in a context of economic constraints and social imperatives. This enabled the development of international partnerships that brought considerable resources and technical assistance to these governments, but with specific conditions related to (i) improving data collection and processing, and (ii) auditing and administration.

22. The documents mention a few of these programs and provide an idea of the amounts granted or loaned to African countries during the period. For example, USAID and the World Bank provided, along with others, US\$56 million to Ghana, US\$42.3 million to Guinea, US\$50 million to Benin, and US\$14 million to Malawi to support education.

23. In this context, initiatives were undertaken to streamline budget practices, increase the share of education in countries' national budgets, and give special attention to basic education. Initiatives were also undertaken to strengthen countries' administrative performances and budgetary execution capacities. Management was improved through development of information systems, the use of school mapping techniques, strengthening human and institutional capacities, etc. Other measures included support to decentralization and to the involvement of the private sector. Provisions were made to support regional and local antenna of national education structures. Efforts were made to support private school systems, as well as local community associations such as parent and community associations.

24. At school and classroom levels, reform initiatives focused on improving teacher training techniques, bringing in more educational materials, facilitating access of girls and rural children to education, increasing parent/community participation in the schools' daily lives, and introducing, wherever possible more participative learning techniques.

25. Programs in Mali, Tanzania and Kenya made particular efforts to develop community-based alternative schooling for dropouts, unschooled children and adult illiterates.

## **5.1. Implementation**

26. Well-intended and well-formulated policies encountered significant challenges during implementation. First, it was assumed that the policy reforms, mostly dictated by the economic conditions, were fully understood and accepted in the social sector. In Mali for example, measures undertaken to cut wastage in public subsidies so that more funds would be allocated to education, especially primary education, were met with considerable resistance from the students and the teachers they primarily intended to help (DeStephano, 1993). The reasons for this are to be found in the socio-economic context characterized by tense relations between government and opposition groups in Mali. Education was one of the major battlegrounds in this conflict. Both camps perceived that control of the education agenda would be crucial in determining control of the broader political agenda. The context of volatile social and economic conditions exacerbated the conflicts, and this had an overall negative effect on the sector. Government initiated reforms aimed at improving economic conditions for students and teachers and improving the teaching/learning processes. However, the unions did not buy in, refused implementation of these reforms, and launched major strikes throughout the country. This forced Government to back down. Conditions in the education sector worsened, which led to more strikes. In other words, implementation of the policies had

an effect contrary to what was intended. It did not leverage desired government policy changes in the direction expected by policy makers. Indeed, it would seem that the social sector did not respond “adequately” to changes instigated from the economic sector.

27. A second challenge concerned resistances within the apparatus of the education system. For example, changes toward decentralization were met with considerable resistance, as they required more supervision, more reporting, more accountability and a lot of time for training. The reviews from Guinea and Mali show that school leaders at district levels were not particularly interested in further decentralization. An assessment conducted in Guinea observed that communication with local branches was “practically non-existent, there (was) a lack of relevant procedures, and decentralized funds (*les Crédits délégués*) were spent with no bookkeeping, no receipts” (Locher, 1997).

28. Timeliness and availability of financial resources constituted another major impediment to successful implementation. Despite in-service and overseas training, education ministries still had limited capacities in the early 1990s to prepare budgets, manage increased funds, and implement procurement procedures from a variety of “donors”.

29. Another problem encountered was the way implementation results were assessed. Providing sufficient money, assessing its use through the collection and analysis of quantitative data, and amending the program on the basis of feedback are, of course, critical to effective implementation, especially for improvements in the quality of education. As observed in Guinea (1993) “the capacity of budgetary conditions to effect efficiency gains in education is limited. Programs could only direct the allocation of funds to areas assumed to have the potential for improving education. Proof of expenditures does not necessarily translate into quality improvement”.

30. The issue of textbooks in Guinea illustrates the gap between the allocation of funds and attaining expected outcomes. The World Bank, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and other major partners, launched a countrywide campaign on textbooks for Guinean students and their teachers. Considerable funds and human resources were allocated. However, a few years later, the evaluation of the program led to the conclusion that expectations were not met. Some of the textbooks had limited pedagogical value; many teachers were unable to optimize their use and make the best out of them because of training limitations. Their distribution was poorly managed as most books went to the black markets of neighboring countries. Gaps between the value of Guinean local currencies and those of the surrounding countries (CFA for Senegal, Cote d’Ivoire and Mali, pounds for Sierra Leone and the dollar for Liberia) were such that exporting the textbooks turned out to be a highly profitable business for merchants and their accomplices within the Guinean educational system.

31. Corrective measures were taken that included a cost-sharing strategy and further decentralization designed to give more responsibility to the parents’ associations and regional directors (*Directeurs Prefectoraux de l’Education*) who were vested with the responsibility of distributing the books, collecting and centralizing the funds obtained through the fees, and coordinating the re-investment of these funds at school unit and prefecture levels. Despite these measures, however, problems remained. On one hand, the cost-sharing fee was too high for students who the greatest need for the books (children from rural zones and poor city neighborhoods and, especially those from families with many children in school). As a result, they resisted paying the fees. In some cases these measures resulted in their removal from school; in these cases, girls were the first to leave.

On the other hand, many children from wealthier families felt that the books were irrelevant to their needs and preferred to use the old *Mamadou et Bineta*<sup>7</sup>. Some private schools even refused to use the new materials and returned them.

32. With hindsight it seems clear that (i) more effort should have been put into piloting the books before dissemination, (ii) more resources should have been invested in training teachers to use the books (with a participative approach to facilitate ownership), and (iii) a better distribution strategy should have been organized from the beginning.

33. Similar problems were found in Ghana where textbooks were an essential policy element (Okyere et al. 1997). Two sets of problems emerged: (i) usage was limited as teachers avoided using the new textbooks for fear that they were not sufficiently durable or would be spoiled or lost, and that the teachers would have to pay for the damage; and (ii) lack of familiarity with the new materials created some reticence in using them. To address these issues, headmasters and teachers received appropriate information regarding textbook care and usage and suggestions were made for improving instruction to make better pedagogical use of the textbooks.

34. In a few cases, problems come from the inability of the education sector itself to fully use, in a timely manner, money it receives. Sometimes, governments are unable to allocate funds to the education sector because of unmet technical requirements. In other situations the sector itself was incapable of spending the money provided by the Government because of the education ministry's inability to follow procedures set by the finance ministry or to assume responsibility for disbursement within the education system itself. In Ghana for example, even with earmarked funds, the MOE was unable to buy textbooks because of the procurement procedures established by the finance ministry and issues related to regulation of public expenditures. In Guinea, poor decentralized accounting hampered disbursements for school construction. In Benin the lack of relevant knowledge in management impeded the access to funds; difficulty in accounting slowed the disbursement of funds (Benin 1993). These are examples of poor absorptive capacity in the narrow (financial) sense of the term.

35. Problems were also caused by difficulties arising from other sectors, especially in the context of USAID's "Non-Project Assistance". On several occasions, finance ministries found themselves in a bind between revenue shortfalls, austere IMF commitments, and the need to fund education within the constraints of the sector's specific timetable. As a result, budgets were often not approved, or they were approved but funds not disbursed, or funds were disbursed but too late, or funds were obtained but they were insufficient. This has a significant negative effect on the way education was delivered at the level of the school and the classroom. This can explain why salaries arrive late and teachers are unmotivated, and why school construction was not completed before the beginning of school years, etc.

36. Uganda provides an illustration of the challenge. Throughout the decade 1990 - 2000, the country had to face the effects of pursuing three goals at the same time: (i) achieving UPE, (ii) decentralizing the system to make it responsive to regional and gender balance, and (iii) improving the quality of education deliveries to provide children with a solid foundation. To achieve these goals, the bulk of the Ugandan reform initiatives were encapsulated in a comprehensive program (ESIP), plus a few other projects focusing on specific issues. ESIP concentrated its efforts in a number of areas including teacher development, decentralization of school administration, and

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<sup>7</sup> *Mamadou et Bineta* is a collection of four primers. This collection has been used since the colonial era in francophone Africa and is still considered as one of the best in the sub region. Today it is widely used in most families as a valuable complement and sometime a replacement to the official educational materials provided by the school system in Guinea.

enhancement of the management system. It was hoped that improvements in these areas would boost the entire system and have a positive and sustainable impact on the quality of education, teacher performance, regional and gender equity, health education (especially issues related to HIV/AIDS), the financing of education, etc.

37. In practice however, a combination of demands from these different initiatives had considerable side effects:

- Attempting to achieve UPE led to huge class size, large numbers of poorly trained teachers, and a shortage of learning materials. These problems resulted in a considerable drop in learning achievement and a general lowering of the quality of education at the primary level;
- School system decentralization policies, despite their positive impact, created confusions between the roles of local governments and school masters in directing the affairs of education at the unit level;
- The management information system, intended to improve policymaking, planning and management, was under used for these functions and poorly articulated with the central and decentralized structures. Moreover, representation of local communities in decision-making was still weak despite the changes in management practices.
- The Teacher Development and Management Plan (TDMP), which was designed to tackle issues of teaching conditions, pre-service teacher training, and professional development was unable to fulfill its mandate. As the 2001 review stated, “the lack of focus in the Teacher Education Department, delays in the introduction of the primary curriculum, the failure to use the TDMS system effectively in addressing continuous professional development of teachers, the failure to use the in-service training potential of the core primary teacher colleges, the loss of technical assistance when the project ended, the delay in implementing EMIS, and other variables have been recent impediments to the improvement of quality teaching and learning for the Ugandan child.” (USAID/Uganda Education Sector Investment Program Review 2001).

38. In response to these issues, a variety of measures was recommended that included: (i) increased decentralization by providing more authority to local stakeholders (teacher training institutions, local community and district representatives, etc.); (ii) better use of TDMP systems as the basis for informed decision-making related to capital investment and recurrent support costs; (iii) greater focus on quality through improving performance by improved coordination and regular in-service training; and (iv) more focus on implementation

39. In a broader sense, many of the problems seen in these countries derive from the pressure created by a basic dilemma: how to bring about improvements in quantity, equity and quality in a context of scarce resources, limited institutional and human capacities, and poor participation in the policymaking processes.

## **5.2. Outcomes of the programs reviewed**

40. Despite all this, education in the 11 countries made considerable achievements. Reforms of the post-Jomtien era led to considerable gains in access and equity. Participation in education provision was broadened in a number of countries; teacher training and development was enhanced through strategies such as distance learning. More girls and children from marginalized/disadvantaged groups were able to

attend schools or receive education in programs especially tailored to their needs. Also, as decentralization and privatization proceeded, budget and financing practices were considerably improved.

41. Guinea, for example, was able to raise its gross enrollment ratio on an average of 10% a year between 1990 and 1995. A coherent policy, effective leadership, constructive countrywide sensitization campaigns, geographically targeted interventions, and strong financial backing all contributed to this. In other countries such as Zambia and Malawi education of girls and marginalized children improved considerably. Despite these achievements however, the post-Jomtien era ended with mixed results, as problems remained unresolved in several domains.

### **5.3. Access and Enrollments**

42. Not all countries met their targets. In Zambia for example, enrolments in primary education stagnated or declined. Gross enrollment rates (GER) dropped from 106% in 1996 to 75% in 1999. Net admission rates also moved down from 44% in 1996 to 32% in 1999. As observed, “in terms of coverage and participation, between Grade I and Grade VII, the gross and net enrolment rates have been on the downward trend since 1996” (Hebert, 2002).

43. Reasons for these poor results are related mainly to high dropouts and high teacher attrition rates. An assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education, following BESSIP-1 in Zambia, indicated that only one child in four reached what teachers consider as minimum achievement levels, and only one in 25 what they considered as desirable achievement in mathematics, English and language. In Tanzania, it took an average of 8 to 9 years to complete primary school.

44. Education needs for adults and out-of-school children were incompletely addressed, and the situation worsened as the number of poor and disadvantaged children increased, especially HIV/AIDS orphans. Even in countries like Kenya where education programs for out-of-school youth (EPUSY) have emerged, taking the form of community learning centers which provide basic learning and minimum care for out-of-school children, the programs didn't enjoy legal status. These children were excluded from opportunities and services available to children in formal schools including material and supervision support (Republic of Kenya, 1997).

45. The syndrome of “teachers without schools and schools without teachers” was pervasive in Guinea, where classes in the capital city were overcrowded while rural schools were poorly attended. In Tanzania, a similar situation was in evidence, as the system was unable to keep pace with the increase of school-age children. The GER in Tanzania fell from 95% to 79% between 1990 and 1995. The lack of classrooms is one of the reasons for such regression. On the average there was one classroom for 125 school-age children. The teacher/pupil ratio was 1:77 by the end of the decade, and only 44% of the 1987-94 cohorts “survived” to sit for the primary education examination, which was a considerable decline compared to the 91% in early 1990s (Government of Tanzania, 2001). Teacher distribution, workload and deployment were still a major problem in Tanzania. The Government reported “wide disparities in teachers human resource allocation by regions and districts, issues of district level staffing and changes in workplaces have not been administrated desirably [and] most private schools function with under trained teachers.”



## 5.4. Quality

46. Learning achievement was reported low despite resources spent on education. Assessments conducted at the end of the decade in Guinea (Locher, 1997) revealed that learning was below expectations, the system was still poorly managed and access to education was still inequitable. School fees were found too high compared to average household earnings, the supervisory capacities were poor, and the higher education/teacher training system was not able to adequately answer to the needs of primary, secondary and technical education.

47. Language of instruction policies and the level of teacher training were cited in other countries as the major contributors to the deterioration of student achievement. In many of them (Mali, Benin, etc.) the language spoken at home is different from that of school. In other countries such as Nigeria, the first grades of schooling are in African mother tongues and the subsequent grades in international languages (English, French, etc.). In both cases, teaching was poor, especially around grade 3 and 4, when children had to shift from one language to the other. As a consequence, learners had problems in reading, writing and arithmetic.

48. Proposed solutions to this problem included: (i) reassessment of teaching and learning strategies to be able to develop informed language policies; (ii) designing targeted interventions aimed at improving student comprehension in the critical grades 3 and 4, (three States in Nigeria were chosen for this purpose); (iii) introduction and use of new, more participatory teaching strategies; and (iv) linking the curriculum to the daily life of children. These remedies called for considerable funding from donors (USAID/Nigeria Education Program – Revised Amendment 4).

49. Regarding teacher development, some of the problems that hampered quality education had to do with the shortage of qualified teaching staff, the lack of instructional materials and inadequate/insufficient infrastructures. Moreover, the training of instructors was too diversified. In Nigeria, in particular, some teachers were trained to serve in secular schools while others were prepared to serve an estimated 7.7 million children who attend Koranic schools, 80% of whom “are said to be female”(USAID Nigeria Education Program, 2001). The difference of level and type of training was considerable. The central government undertook a series of measures to level the differences between the various training activities and streamline teaching/learning practices, especially those delivered in Koranic schools. Other actions included: (i) allocating over 30% of the teacher training centers’ activities to focus on Koranic school teachers; (ii) reviewing the national certification for teaching to take into account training received outside the regular system; and (iii) applying incentive grants to selected primary schools.

## 5.5. Classroom management and teaching/learning practices

50. Curricular and teaching practices were still heavily focused on traditional approaches with little attention to the learners and to strategies that foster gender sensitivity. Also, the conditions for appropriate teaching/learning processes were hardly met as classes were either overcrowded in cities or deserted by students and teachers in remote areas. Studies conducted in Tanzania substantiated the correlation between overcrowded classes and poor exam results.

51. It was also difficult to implement equitable distribution of personnel across schools. In Tanzania, for example, there was a wide discrepancy between workload across schools and districts, as well as within schools. On the average, urban teachers in

Tanzania teach 15 hours a week, which represents just 63% of the national requirements. Attempts to redistribute teachers, recruit new ones and retrain those who were already recruited were difficult to implement. Political and social pressures were such in countries like Kenya that administrators in charge of personnel management did not have “a free hand in deploying teachers, with the result that some areas were grossly over-staffed while others were seriously understaffed” (Bonner, 2001). In more favorable contexts, they do not always have the necessary information for decision-making. In Kenya, it was observed that policymaking regarding posting and redeployment was not always based on “considered evaluation of systematic data and information ... a full picture of current status and future needs is not always systematically painted.” Finally there are new domains that were not fully addressed, most of them having to do with the training of instructors and facilitators for children under 6 years old and for adolescent/adult learners.

52. Uganda provides another interesting case. A complex and comprehensive plan was designed to address the issue of teacher development. However, delays in finalizing project activities resulted in jeopardizing the program’s potential to build a national pool of qualified teachers to support the reforms. After six years of implementation, schools from secluded areas were still understaffed due to teachers’ resistance to the redeployment policy and other management problems. Teaching performance was still poor despite efforts to upgrade the pre-service and in-service programs. The management of teachers remains inadequately resolved as evaluation processes were questioned by both evaluators and teachers.

## **5.6. Resource mobilization, financing, and external aid policies**

53. In many sub-Saharan African educational systems, cost sharing was introduced by programs involving government, international development partners, local communities and non-governmental organizations. Contributions from NGOs and external agencies in particular resulted in increasing enrolments and retention of children from poor families and disadvantaged groups. Pre-schools, in particular, benefited from such assistance, since such aid focused on improving health, meeting food security requirements, increasing income generation at local community level, and developing labor saving technologies (Kenya, p. 37).

54. Cost sharing was seen as having potential for reducing the burden placed on the state. In the broader context of macroeconomic structural adjustments, it was also seen as a condition for increased international aid to the sector. It was also seen as a means for strengthening local community ownership of their schools. Tanzania, with less than 8% of financing coming from outside and the remaining shared between central and local governments, provides a typical illustration of cost sharing arrangements. A Local Government Reform Program (LGRP) was initiated to give more autonomy to local levels and permit them to effectively participate in all steps of education policy making and implementation.

55. Despite the perceived advantages of cost sharing strategies, the documentation indicates some problems:

- In Uganda, for example, cost sharing was first advocated, but finally dropped because, in practice, impoverished local communities were unable to bear their share. However, this put a heavy burden on Government which continued to finance the system, even if led increased debt. The abolition of cost sharing also reinforced the assumption that education is a Government responsibility. It altered the sense of local ownership, and reduced

cooperation between Government and local communities in tackling school affairs.

- In the broader context of the sub-region, the problem seemed even more complicated. There was a decline in international aid, as the EFA monitoring report shows (UNESCO 2002). Even in situations where financing increased, it hardly matched the demand for education. For example, in Ethiopia the level of expenditure increased by 4.2% during the 4 years of ESDP-1 (1994-1998), while primary education grew by 13.4% for the same period. The system had to care for about 2.9 million additional students.
- Where funding increased proportional to the growing demand, there was no proof of allocation of resources from central to decentralized levels. For example, in Guinea and Mali there were indications that school leaders had paid lip service to decentralization for about four years during which a “deconcentration” strategy, with weak supervision and reporting practices was implemented. In practice, the system remained centralized for a significant period of time. Most financial operations were undertaken in the capital and, occasionally, in a few provincial capitals. In these conditions, very little trickled down to the community and school levels.
- In situations where parents and local communities indicated willingness to participate in funding, their initiatives were often hampered by poverty. In Kenya for example, it is reported that “banking too much on household financing has led to the under-funding of non-salary costs, which had negative impact on quality education” (p. 26). In Guinea, the NAFA program provides another illustration. Local communities were able to participate in the construction of centers but were unable to provide, in a sustained manner, the salary of the second instructor, although this was part of the program agreements.
- Financing from the international partners sometimes overly emphasized hardware. In Guinea, for example, 8 out of the 10 major international partners put a considerable part of their resources into school construction. In Zambia, “the resources needed for capital expenditure such as infrastructure construction, and rehabilitation of buildings have mainly come from donors agencies.” The same could be said about most of the other countries involved in this study. The advantage of such policy is to support school expansion in situations of high growth of education demand. However one of the side effects is to reduce the amount of funds available for other activities that are critical to quality education (teacher development, the curriculum, etc.).

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

56. This study has analyzed documentation focused on the implementation of education programs. A close analysis of the documentation available for the eleven countries clearly indicates the implementation challenges facing the programs they review. These challenges include factors that are exogenous and endogenous to the education system. The former include social, budgetary and (now with HIV/AIDS) health issues. Although the endogenous factors appear to be numerous, a closer analysis reveals that, by and large, they are related to capacities for planning and management, mainly the latter. Examples include: abilities to pay teachers on time, thereby maintaining their morale and motivation; the abilities to follow financial procedures required by finance ministries in order for them to disburse in a timely manner; capacities in textbook procurement and utilization; capacities to develop and use management information systems for forward planning and teacher deployment; the ability to develop sufficient accountability and reporting for effective decentralization, as well as to ensure that all actors are informed of their respective rights and responsibilities in the context of decentralization policies.

57. The descriptive and analytical value of the documentation reviewed here varies. Nonetheless, it brushes a picture of relatively clear policy goals that are, often, eclipsed by the difficulties of implementation. In other words, it points to a “disconnect” between policy ambitions and implementation realities. A number of findings and conclusions emerge from this analysis that provide a glimpse into the magnitude of the issues of implementation.

58. Recognition of uncertainty means that flexibility at implementation becomes an important policy consideration. We have seen that, indeed, policy becomes as implementation does. The ability for intelligent and informed management to act as a function of evolving situations needs to be encouraged. Responsiveness and adaptability are essential and need to be built into the policies, programs and projects. In other words, many of the difficulties encountered during implementation reflect assumptions made during the design of the policy, such as the assumption that education policies operate in a stable environment and that decisions made in one set of political conditions will be implemented without much alteration in another. Such assumptions need to integrate the probability of unforeseen change.

59. Throughout the reviews, many of the major problems remained either unresolved or partially resolved. Issues of access, equity, quality, and relevance remained basically the same during the decade, and by the time educators shifted from policymaking to implementation the targets had moved and problems became more complicated. Reducing the time lag between policymaking and implementation could enhance effectiveness. A corollary to this may be that policies should be reviewed more frequently in the light of evidence.

60. This study suggests the need to revisit the very concept of policy, especially when it is formulated without a theory and/or strategy of action – i.e., implementation. Policymaking often has a large political component. This means trade-offs, compromises and vagueness in order to develop consensus. What may be appropriate during the policy formulation phase may turn out to be a source of difficulty during implementation. The reports reviewed indicate that educational reforms have been initiated, but were rarely fully implemented, mostly because of the education systems’ inability to put decisions in practice, especially at the local levels, where the bulk of the work is concentrated – i.e., closer to the classroom.

61. Thought should be given to the functions of education policies and why are they even formulated. Weiler (1983), for example, suggests that their major function is to provide political legitimacy to those who promulgate them. The usability of reform initiatives and their pedagogical value for developing critical thinking on educational practices merit further exploration. Several questions should be addressed. Are policies drafted mainly in order to develop agreement among senior policy makers, including the “donor” agencies? Are policies drafted to guide actions and address needs of actors in the field? Are policies drafted with the intent of becoming tools to support capacity building? Without clarity on these issues, there is a potential for confusion around the very functions of policies and policymaking, and the roles of the actors in these processes. Such confusion may detract from capacities for implementation.

62. This is especially the case for decentralization. As Fullan (1999:58) points out, the success of decentralization requires that it be supported by a system of knowledge development and accountability in order to build “local capacity for examining and taking action” and to develop the trust and the capacities needed for such policies to command the respect and resources they need.

63. Education systems are complex, with a tendency toward the chaotic – they often do not respond as expected by policymakers to pressures from the socio-economic context. Greater participation of civil society organizations (student/teachers unions, parliamentarians, NGOs, etc.) in decision-making may serve to promote ownership of educational measures dictated by the broader macroeconomic context.

64. Indeed, here is one of the most glaring of the “disconnects” between policy formulation and implementation. The former is often a top-down exercise. But, its implementation – i.e., success – depends on the many who will be implementing the policy. If they are excluded from the policymaking processes, they will have little incentive to make it work; they may also lack the depth of information and understanding required for detailed policies to become translated into their daily activities as teachers, school directors, inspectors, administrators and planners at all levels<sup>8</sup>.

65. On the other hand, acting in ways that do not go in the direction of the proclaimed policies may be how these implementing agents gain ownership of the de facto policies that, in practice, they are implementing. Stakeholders, who did not have their say in the policymaking processes, may “distort” the policies to ensure that they fit with the realities of the field (i.e., closer to the classroom). This is both rational and constructive, but it poses the central dilemma of the need for policy *and* flexibility during implementation.

66. Cost recovery approaches, despite their considerable advantages regarding ownership and sustainability, turned out to be difficult to implement in the countries under review. Poverty was the major reason for this. This, however, does not preclude in-kind contributions such as labor for construction.

67. Role definitions among partners would also merit clarification. The new context of further decentralization, the increased involvement of parents and learners and greater participation of local communities, all have consequences regarding the way funds are disbursed, structures are reshaped, and stakeholders interact. Quality education could be affected by the ways these issues are tackled.

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<sup>8</sup> The importance of consultation and, better yet, participation was one of the major lessons that came out of ADEA’s 1995 Biennial that focused on the processes of educational policymaking. See Evans, Sack & Shaw (1996) for an overview of the findings that emerged from the six in-depth case studies commissioned for that meeting.

68. Disconnects between the policymaking processes and the realities of implementation account for a gap that, unfortunately, is little taken into account during the former. In various forms, these are disconnects between theory and practice, where the former is the policymaking processes (generally, by the central public authorities, sometimes with their external partners) and the latter the myriad details of getting it all to work (in the field, by so many actors, especially teachers, responsible for delivering education to the children).

## 6.1. What can be done?

69. It would be facetious to suggest that there is no need for policy. Rather, what is necessary is to figure out how to increase the probability of congruency between the policy orientations and implementation practices and capacities. Policy formulation processes that are restricted to leaders and their advisors need to be avoided. There are many reasons for this. Pragmatism means taking into account that likelihood that the policy will be implemented by the “apparatus” that is the education ministry with its myriad actors, including planners, curriculum developers, teacher trainers, administrators, inspectors, school directors and, most importantly, the teachers<sup>9</sup>. Then there is the civil society including PTAs, community associations, NGOs (national and international), the private sector, the non-formal sector, and traditional educational systems that are often not accounted for but have considerable bearing on education in Africa. This is where the complexity/chaos comes in. And this is why a theory of action – or a strategy for implementation that gives full consideration to the roles of all the actors – is absolutely necessary if policy is to have any meaning in practice.

70. Capacity development is probably the key to a number of these issues. The abilities to manage implementation at all levels, to deal with the unforeseen, to be responsive to evolving situations and to adapt implementation practices to them are all dependent on the capacities of the implementers. Capacity, of course, is not only a property of individuals; it also refers to institutional capacities to: (i) have full and genuine ownership of their policies; (ii) generate and use information; (iii) allow for flexibility; (iv) provide incentives for creative approaches; and (v) adapt to changing circumstances. This said, people, motivated and capable individuals are the foundations on which institutions rise or fall. Capacity issues are magnified in the context of decentralization, which, as is generally understood, requires greater capacities at the decentralized levels in order to implement effectively and to ensure the heightened accountability that generally accompanies decentralization.

71. One approach could be the undertaking of functional analyses of national ministries of education. Such analyses need to be highly participative and recognize that an education ministry is a special “firm” whose effectiveness requires full cooperation and participation from all its actors, including those outside of the formal structures of the education system<sup>10</sup>. Although focusing on the education ministry as a firm, and mostly concerned with making it more effective, such an approach could provide momentum for the development of a theory of action and broad consensus for modalities of implementation. However, this can be intensive work, for which there are no “quick and dirty” solutions. They have to be developed for each case, with the full participation of the concerned actors.

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<sup>9</sup> Of the six case studies produced for the 1995 ADEA Biennial, only the Ghana case study described a policy formulation process that included little-to-no consultation (Fobih et al. 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Such an approach is presented in Sack and Saïdi (1997).

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