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Low cost private schools for the poor: What public policy is appropriate?

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ABSTRACT

Recent attention has focused on the existence of non-government schools that cater to children from low-income families. These schools can now be found in the majority of developing countries, many of which have a prescribed public policy to provide free public education. This raises the question, why would a low-income family choose to send a child to a fee-paying school if a place in a free school were available? This paper will report on case studies of low-fee schools in Jamaica, Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Indonesia and Pakistan and will assess the reasons for their increased demand. In the past, some have argued that development assistance agencies should limit assistance to public school sector. Others have argued that the public sector is inadequate and in many ways has failed in its ambitions to provide a minimum quality for every child.

This paper will consider what public policy should be toward low-cost private schools, including the policy of development assistance agencies which seek to assist low and middle income countries as well as the appropriate public policy for national and local governments. The paper will conclude with several recommendations. One recommendation is that although children from low-income families attend non-government schools, they continue to be citizens; hence they should not be excluded from poverty assistance strategies. A second recommendation is to expand government statistical functions so that non-government schools are regularly included in the calculations of enrollment rates. Lastly, the paper does not recommend voucher or other program of publically financed school choice on the grounds that the public sector should remain the main conduit for public schooling. It does, however, raise questions as to the limits of the public sector in delivering high quality schooling and whether these limits should be more candidly acknowledged.

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1. Non-government schools¹

1.1. History

At one time or another, non-government schools have played a role in nearly every country's educational history. Throughout the world, schools not controlled (or operated) by the government provided the first formal educational opportunities for children—whether begun by individuals, the private sector or religious organizations. However, these were often elite non-government schools, only accessible to the country's wealthiest citizens. The visible nature of elite non-government schools has given rise to the common misconception that all non-government schools are for the wealthy, thus making the mere possibility of low-fee non-government schools in developing countries seem paradoxical to

some. In the modern education age, however, when nearly all nations have accepted that education is a basic human right that should be made available to all, 'non-government schools for the poor' have become a distinct reality in nearly all developing countries.

1.1.1. Governmental support

In Bhutan, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Haiti, Swaziland, Aruba, and Trinidad and Tobago, among others, governments appear to have accepted that the non-government sector is necessary and that it can fulfill a role that the public system cannot (or will not). Perhaps best known is the large-scale Chilean voucher program in which the government provides per-pupil vouchers for students to attend private schools (both those owned by private franchises and those independently owned) (Arenas, 2004; Elacqua et al., 2009; Hsieh and Urquiola, 2006; McEwan and Carnoy, 2000; Somers et al., 2004). Several other countries have also implemented voucher reforms but these will be discussed in a later section on alternative models (2.3.2). In 2009, India adopted The Right To Education Law, which requires that 25 percent of the first grade places in non-government schools be offered to children from low-income families. The government promises to reimburse the cost

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¹ We have chosen to use the term "non-government schools" due to the connotation that "private" often has with regard to being elite and/or for-profit. However, the terms non-government, private, independent and preparatory (in the case of Jamaica) are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

of tuition for these low-income students. About 10 percent of India's children in lower primary and about 25 percent in upper primary attend non-government schools (Ahmed and Govinda, 2010, p. 372).

Taking a less direct approach, the government of Bhutan conducted extensive school-mapping in order to assess the public system's shortcomings and subsequently worked with communities to set up non-government schools to account for the under-supply of public school spaces (Bray, 2002; Kitaev, 2004). In the Philippines, as well as Trinidad and Tobago, the government has taken to purchasing seats in private schools in order to meet excess demand for education (Kitaev, 2004; Patrinos, 2006). In addition to an eight-year voucher program experiment, the Colombian government has recently turned to the idea of contracting out to private organizations to run schools designed for low-income students (Angrist et al., 2002; Bettinger, 2005; Cox and Jimenez, 1990; Uribe et al., 2006; Villa and Duarte, 2005).

At the other end of the spectrum are countries like Barbados, Mauritius, Nepal and Uzbekistan. All of these countries (in addition to several other transitional economies) have governments that strongly believe the delivery of education to their nation's children is the sole responsibility of the state. The most extreme of these is Nepal, where the non-government education system has faced extreme adversity from the Maoist movement, often in the form of demonstrations in Kathmandu (Caddell, 2007).

1.2. Expansion of non-government schools

The majority of developing countries in the world fall somewhere between these two categories—with government support and regulatory measures ranging from clearly delineated and strictly enforced to non-existent. While the relative size, support and impact of low-fee private schools vary by country, there are two seemingly ubiquitous reasons for the rise of the sector in developing countries. The first reason, alluded to in the previous section, is that inadequate or uneven distribution of government finance leads to demand for schooling that non-government schools can fill (Colclough, 1997). The second reason is low quality and/or inefficient public education. In other words, non-government schools have proliferated in developing countries in order to meet excess demand resulting from an insufficient supply of public school spaces and/or to provide alternatives to a failing public education system. While wealthy families have traditionally used private schools as alternatives to the public system, in the past few decades this same trend has been seen for low-income families as well.

Phillipson et al. (2008) provides additional reasons. He suggests that low-cost private education has increased in developing countries in recent years due, in part, to an oversupply of teachers, hidden costs in government schools, high private tuition (in high-fee schools), a preferable language of instruction, poor public performance (i.e., academic achievement) and religious preference. In addition, Tooley (2009) claims that low-cost private schools are likely to provide lower teacher absenteeism (due to increased accountability to parents and school owners), more engaged teachers (due to more local recruitment), smaller class sizes and more individualized attention. Although there is evidence in the literature and from our recent fieldwork in six case study countries to support the claims by both Phillipson and Tooley, low-cost non-government schools are not without their problems and controversies (discussed in the following section).

1.3. Debates and controversies

Several arguments have been used against the use of non-government schools to achieve universal basic education. The

first concerns the fact that basic education is a human right that only states can deliver. The argument holds that for-profit institutions have no essential interest in delivering education services to the poor and non-profit charities cannot deliver services on a national scale without relying on a public subsidy, essentially making them a public responsibility even if the state contracts for the service delivery. This argument holds that states have the moral and legal responsibility to protect minorities, promote equity and diminish exclusion (Lewin, 2007, p. 42).

Second, if non-subsidized providers in low-income communities depend on community revenue, including tuition, they are essentially drawing down the community's wealth. The availability of income to support non-government schools is much more limited in low-income countries than in high-income countries, among other things because of the differences in the age dependency ratios. Relative to GDP/capita, teacher salaries in low-income countries may be six times than those in high-income countries. Additionally, available domestic revenue is only 15 percent of GDP compared to 40 percent in wealthy countries. This suggests that the social cost of basic education is significantly higher in low-income countries, hence arguments for non-government schools in high-income countries cannot easily be applied in low-income countries (Lewin, 2007, p. 43). Ultimately, as Watkins (2004) puts it, "Should the world's poorest people really be expected to choose between health and the education of their children? And what is the market rationale to suggest that such choices make sense for the rest of society?" (p. 9).

Third, the claims of greater efficiency, lower cost, higher quality and higher relevance in the non-government sector can only be true under certain conditions. These include "informed choice, transparent accountability, adequate regulation and an effective legal framework," and these rarely, if ever pertain to the reality of the poorest households in developing countries (Lewin, 2007, p. 44). The lack of informed choice, in particular, is especially troubling. Opponents of non-government schooling claim that without sufficient information low-cost private schools will simply be taking advantage of poor parents (Probe, 1999; Watkins, 2004).

Fourth, it has been suggested that there is no OECD or rapidly developing country that has depended on non-government provision to achieve universal attendance in basic education. This is because basic education has a wide range of externalities, which are naturally provided through state involvement. (Lewin, 2007, p. 44)

The fifth argument is that relying on non-government schools can undermine the public education system. Parents may choose to enroll their children in non-government schools because of shortcomings in the public system. While this may prove to be an appropriate (short-term) fix for the students who move, it may 'skim' the public system of some of the most motivated students. Moreover, as Watkins points out: "failure to address the challenge through increased public investment and improvements in service delivery will inevitably undermine public education" (Watkins, 2004, p. 10).

Finally, some claim that even low-cost non-government schools will never be able to accommodate the poorest households (Probe, 1999; Rose and Adelabu, 2007; Srivastava and Walford, 2007; Watkins, 2004).

We have kept these important arguments in mind throughout our literature review and fieldwork in Jamaica, Kenya, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tanzania and Ghana. And though compelling, we have found evidence that sometimes belies these concerns. We comment on each point and offer suggestions as to appropriate public policy.

2. Cross-country analyses

2.1. Methods

Two methods of research have shaped the study of non-government schools. The more common method is to take a sample from a publically available list and to investigate how non-government schools compare with government schools in terms of output, efficiency, cost and benefits (ADB, 2003; Fahmi, 2009; James et al., 1996). These have usually utilized cross-sectional school surveys, but on occasion they have included longitudinal household surveys (Oketch et al., 2010a). The problem with this method is that many non-government schools do not appear on official lists and therefore cannot be included in the samples. The second method is designed to overcome this problem by taking a catchment area and locating each and every school within it. By this method, many non-government schools have appeared though they had not been previously included on official lists (Tooley, 2009).

Our study was required to take information from Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Jamaica, but did not have sufficient resources to support experiments, surveys or intensive catchment area samples in six countries. Born from necessity as well as virtue, our methods included a sequential sampling technique (a.k.a. convenience or snowball sampling) where school officials and other informants were used to identify the location of other schools. For instance, by asking a night watchman at a hotel in Kenya we found that his children attended an unregistered non-government school nearby, which we then analyzed. The school's headmaster then provided us with the names and contact information of other, similar schools nearby which were subsequently included in our study. We applied these sequential techniques in neighborhoods distributed around each of the six countries. This method generated case illustrations of all possible categories of non-government schools regardless of whether they appeared on official lists.

For instance, our methods generated case illustrations in seven different categories:

- (1) Those operated by churches or mosques (i.e., religious organizations).
- (2) Those operated by individual private proprietors (or community groups).
- (3) Those operated by NGOs.
- (4) Those registered with the Ministry of Education.
- (5) Those registered with government ministries other than MOE.
- (6) Those operating under temporary or provisional licenses.
- (7) Those operating without any registration or license.

Our study included interviews with parents, teachers, headmasters, government officials at local and national levels, and officials of non-governmental organizations, such as the association of private school headmasters, which represented non-government schools. These interviews were conducted at the school site at a time when parents were picking up or dropping off a pupil. In each country 20–25 schools were analyzed and between 15 and 20 interviews were conducted. While each country differed in the categories of private schooling, the key element in our sampling was to find that the categories of non-government schools were not uniform across countries. While we cannot claim that our sample of schools is representative, we can claim that they represent illustrations of each country's category of non-government schooling.

We did not allow high tuition schools to enter our sample. We defined a low cost school as one whose tuition was lower than half the minimum wage. While we were conscious that the local

minimum wage applies to those with wage employment, we believe the level broadly represents a level of poverty more generally. In the sections that follow, we report the results from the six case study countries and merge these with the more general literature.

2.2. Demand for low-cost non government schools

The demand for non-government schools is on the rise across the globe. According to UNESCO statistics, approximately 16 percent of the world's primary school students were enrolled in non-government schools in 2000—by 2009 this number rose to more than 20 percent. Although the specific reasons for increased enrolments are often unique to each country, there is an underlying theme that runs throughout the majority of countries. Simply put, the demand for non-government education comes from the inability of the public sector to meet demand because of (i) an insufficient supply of public school spaces; (ii) the low-quality of public schooling; or (iii) a public education system that fails to meet the diverse, differentiated needs of families. These needs may include demand for teaching in an international language, a religious emphasis or smaller classes and more personalized teaching.

2.2.1. Inadequate public supply

Ghana has experienced large increases in the number of non-government primary schools, as well as in the non-government sector's share of primary enrollments in recent years. While some have claimed that these schools are an urban phenomenon, Tooley (2005) found that many low-cost private schools had been established in rural areas, where public schools were few and far between. A similar situation has arisen in Indonesia. Although private schools can be found throughout the country, those that serve low-income populations are often established in remote areas in order to meet demand. An extreme example from our fieldwork was a Baduy school started in West Java that we reached only after a five-hour walk through the mountains—the nearest public school was more than 10 km away. Furthermore, at the junior-secondary level, low-cost private schools have been established in order to provide educational opportunities for those students with low primary exit examination scores, who are unable to secure spaces in public schools.

Despite the prohibition of private education in the 1970s, there has been recent rapid growth of the private sector in Pakistan. The majority of this growth has occurred in rural areas and among the country's poorest households. While the government has made great strides toward increased educational coverage, low-cost private schools have been necessary in order to address the needs of children who still do not have a viable public school option.

In Kenya insufficient supply is the overriding reason for the rise in low-cost private schools in the country (Oketch et al., 2010a). Although this phenomenon is found in rural areas (where infrastructure, roads and public services are limited), the most significant impact arises from the urban slums. Due in large part to property rights issues, public schooling options are woefully inadequate for the number of school-age children in some of the continent's largest slums. With a strong desire for education, many individual proprietors and small community organizations have banded together to establish low-cost primary schools that are easily accessible to even the youngest children—whose parents are often unwilling to allow them to travel the distances necessary to reach the nearest public school. Even those old enough to take the trip are often greeted by educational institutions that are severely over-crowded. These independently owned low-fee schools therefore address a very important need in the lives of many poor Kenyans.

In addition to the case-study countries, increased demand for low-cost schools has been impacted by the inadequate supply of public school spaces throughout the world. For example, Uganda, Kenya's neighbor to the west, has seen significant increases in the private sector as a result of insufficient supply in the public sector (Kisira, 2008). In West Africa, Nigeria has experienced large increases in unrecognized private schools, for much the same reason as its East African counterparts (Rose and Adelabu, 2007; Tooley et al., 2005; Umar, 2008). Outside Africa, the Philippines has seen a similar trend—although recent increases in public school spaces have actually led to a reduction in the overall share of private school students in the country (Jimenez and Sawada, 2001). In Thailand, short public supply has also influenced growth in the low-cost private sector, especially at the secondary school level (Pinyakong et al., 2007). Much the same can be said about the private education sector in rural China (Tooley, 2009).

Finally, as in Kenya, inadequacies in government funding for education have led to greater community involvement in education (financing and otherwise) (Epari et al., 2011). This has resulted in increased demand for (and eventual supply of) low-cost private schools in Chad, Malawi, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bhutan, among others (Bray, 1997).

As can be seen from these examples, a country's inability to provide an adequate supply of public school spaces often leads to increased demand for low-cost non-government schooling alternatives.

2.2.2. Low-quality public schooling

In recent years, Jamaica has reached near universal primary enrollment and there are few concerns about an insufficient supply of public school spaces. The quality of these spaces, however, is not so certain. Much of the demand for low-cost non-government schools in Jamaica comes from parents who are dissatisfied with an ineffective public education system. School owners and parents both regularly noted that private schools were able to provide smaller classes and more individualized attention than the public schools, which was especially important for students who were reported as being 'forgotten' or 'left behind' in the public system. In addition to slow-learners getting lost in the public system, parents often noted that crime and violence had become the norm in public schools and that low-cost non-government schools provided a safer, more nurturing learning environment for their children. By focusing on students likely to be 'forgotten' in the public system, low-cost private schools often target the most at-risk youth with their services. This is a similar approach to the one taken in South Africa, where providing private educational opportunities to those at-risk for gang involvement has become an important niche in the demand-driven system (Chisholm, 2004; Fiske and Ladd, 2004; Reschovsky, 2006).

In Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and Pakistan parents perceived private schools to be of higher quality than public schools. Citing issues such as poor national examination scores, over-crowding, high teacher absenteeism, and unengaged teachers, parents often worked to scrape together small amounts of money so they could remove their children from the public school system. This is a common thread throughout the research in nearly every country with a thriving low-cost private education sector. Teacher absenteeism, for example, has been found to be a serious problem in Zambia (Das et al., 2007) and India (Duflo and Hanna, 2005), as well as Pakistan (Andrabi et al., 2008; Das et al., 2006). In India low-quality public schooling is also driving private demand. Shah and Veetil (2006) note that "the continuing decline of the quality of the state education system has led, by default, to one of the highest levels of privatization of education in the developing world. The proportion of students in private schools in urban areas of many states in India is higher than that in any developed country" (p. 3).

As Oketch et al. (2010b) point out for Kenya: "one would have expected free primary education to reduce the use of private schools...but the results reveal that in spite of free primary education, parents still are searching for a 'good' school for their child. It appears that this search is in favor of the 'low cost' private schools rather than the public schools" (p. 181).

2.2.3. Differentiated demand

Historically the most prominent aspect of differentiated demand in education has been religion. Nearly all countries have religiously affiliated non-government schools that provide an additional focus on religion that cannot often be met by the public sector. In Indonesia, for example, the branch of the ministry that oversees more than 90 percent of private schools in the country is the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA). Although schools under MORA are required to follow the national curriculum, they are allowed to supplement it with additional religious instruction. Religion, therefore, is one of the main reasons why the low-cost private sector in Indonesia is relatively large.

In both Pakistan and Tanzania, the demand for low-cost schooling options has been caused by parental preference for greater emphasis on religion in schools. Recently it has been argued that the role of organized religion in development has been seriously under-estimated in development economics. Nowhere is this more evident than in the education sector (Marshall, 2010). In addition to these countries, religion has, not surprisingly, played a major role in the expansion of low-cost private education throughout the world. Several other examples include Venezuela (Allcott and Ortega, 2009), Sierra Leone (Wodon and Ying, 2009), Democratic Republic of Congo (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon, 2009a), Bangladesh (ADB, 2003; Oketch et al., 2010a; Asadullah, 2009; Bano, 2007), India (Jodhka and Bora, 2009) and Nigeria (Reichmuth, 1989; Roberts et al., 2009).

One important distinction between differentiated demand and the two previous impetuses for demand (inadequate supply and low-quality public schooling) is that differentiated demand on its own does not necessarily provide evidence that the public sector is not actually meeting its goals. Accordingly, Wolff et al. (2005) offer that expansion of the non-government education sector should not be seen as mutually exclusive to a thriving public education sector. They make this claim in reference to Latin America, where non-government schools play a large role in the provision of education throughout the region. For example, as a region, non-government education accounts for 26 percent of preschool, 16 percent of primary and 25 percent of secondary enrollments. By country, the private primary share was, as of 2005: Argentina 20 percent, Chile 40 percent, Colombia 19 percent, Guatemala 13 percent, Peru 15 percent, and Venezuela 19 percent. The demand that led to these large non-government school shares is driven by differentiated demand, as well as an inadequate supply of high-quality public schooling options.

2.2.4. Outstanding issues

An additional driving force of the demand for low-cost non-government schooling is gender inequality. This is not to say that public schools cannot effectively reduce the gender gaps (access and achievement) in developing countries but in times of need, alternative options are sometimes beneficial. Of the case study countries, Pakistan has recently implemented the most female-focused initiatives for schooling. While Aslam (2007) points to the inadequacies in the public system for dealing with gender parity concerns, Andrabi et al. (2008) provide evidence that private schooling can be used to address some of these issues. Other recent female-focused private initiatives and research include the stipend program for girls in Bangladesh (Raynor and Wesson, 2006), a scholarship program in Cambodia (Filmer and Schady, 2008) and

studies in Nigeria (Lincove, 2009) and India (Srivastava, 2005), which found that parents believe low-fee private schools present the best opportunities for their daughters.

Another point worth mentioning is that public schools are not always free—and not always less expensive than low-cost private schooling options. One of the reasons that non-government schools first developed in Kenya was the high costs associated with public schools—and even with free primary education, the public system has fees (e.g., uniforms, examinations, even desks and chairs in some instances). In China, private education grew in the early 1980s due to the rising costs of public schooling—mostly through the establishment of unregistered/unrecognized private schools (Deng, 1997; Lin, 1999). More than twenty years later when James Tooley began his research in the Gansu province of China, public school cost was still an important factor in parents' decisions to enroll their children in private schools (Tooley, 2009).

Finally, the role of the government in the expansion of non-government schooling cannot be overlooked. In Nepal, for example, there has been demand for private schooling but it has been difficult to implement due to significant government opposition (Caddell, 2007). Similarly, in Nigeria the government has been found to intimidate, rather than support, private schools (Phillipson et al., 2008). Barbados, Mauritius and many of the transitional economies (including Belarus, Uzbekistan and Moldova) have also faced government obstacles when private actors have attempted to expand the country's low-cost private education sector (Kitaev, 2004). Additionally, while private education has been expanding rapidly in parts of Malawi, the central government has been seeking to maintain control over the education sector, which has made the expansion more difficult (Rose, 2005).

On the other hand, the government of Bhutan has used school-mapping as a needs assessment tool before supporting communities with the establishment of local, private schools (Bray, 2002). Similarly, in Cote D'Ivoire the government has fully supported a public subsidization program for private schools (Sakellariou and Patrinos, 2004). Arguably the most interesting situation exists in Madagascar, where the government has raised fees in the public sector to increase revenues for public schools—but contrary to the government's intentions, the increased fees have actually caused increased demand for low-cost non-government schools in the country (Glick and Sahn, 2006). The majority of developing countries in the world fall somewhere between these two extremes—with government support and regulatory measures ranging from clearly delineated and strictly enforced to non-existent.

In conclusion, ultimately the demand for low-cost non-government schools has grown in nearly all developing countries. The majority of this growth has resulted from inadequacies in the public sector (i.e., insufficient supply, low-quality public provision, and/or differentiated demand).

2.3. Degree to which non-government schools accommodate low-income children

Evidence from the case studies shows that in each of the six countries private schools enrolled children from low-income families. In Jamaica, for example, 10–11 percent of students from the lowest two economic quintiles were enrolled in private schools by 2007—and the overall proportion of private primary school students in the country has been increasing. Low tuition rates and subsidized fees for the extremely poor have fueled this demand. For example, average monthly fees in unregistered private schools in Ghana were found to be approximately 12 percent of the minimum wage (while those in registered schools were approximately 20 percent of the minimum wage). In order to put these

figures into perspective, Akaguri (2010) offers that poor households in Ghana spend approximately 16 percent of the minimum wage on public education, thus making unregistered private schools the more economical alternative.

In Pakistan, tuition rates in rural areas are low—typically less than the average daily wage of an unskilled worker. Furthermore, nearly 10 percent of the country's poorest households enrolled children in private schools by the turn of the century. This is likely to have increased with such initiatives as the 2006 Education Voucher Scheme, which enrolled 10,000 students by mid-2008 (Salman, 2010). In both Pakistan and Nepal, Save the Children (2002) found that “there are a multitude of private schools catering to lower income groups, both in urban and rural areas” (p. 4). However, Andrabi et al. (2007) found in their study of Punjab schools that “private schools choose to locate in richer villages and richer settlements within villages, limiting access for poor households” (p. ii).

The Indonesian non-government junior-secondary sector has developed, at least in part, for the purpose of accommodating those students unable to find a space in a public school (due to poor exam scores) or because no public secondary school served a particular town or village. By design, this sector disproportionately enrolls low-income children due to their more limited primary schooling opportunities with regard to quality. Low-cost private schools in Kenya are nearly ubiquitous. During our fieldwork, we found that there were more low-cost private schools than anyone was aware of—and with their low school fees, they were able to accommodate some of the lowest-income households even in poor areas. Because many of these schools do not own the land on which they reside, they are not registered with the Ministry of Education, which limits the available data on their numbers and enrollments.² A similar issue exists in India, where the unaided sector of the private education system is the one that serves low-income students, and is made up of many unrecognized schools (Mehrotra and Panchamukhi, 2007).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are several countries where affordable non-government schools for low-income students have been determined to be viable options. These include Peru, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Paraguay, Mexico, and Ecuador (Faulhaber, 2008). Additionally, in Argentina, just over 8 percent of students from the lowest income quintile were enrolled in private school as of 2005 (Morduchowicz, 2005). In Bolivia, Psacharopoulos et al. (1997) ultimately concluded that there is a “remarkable willingness of households in a poor country to pay for private education for their children” (p. 404).

2.3.1. Reaching those most in need

Despite these successes, one of the main arguments against the use of non-government schools to achieve universal basic education is that these schools will never actually be able to reach the poorest families—arguably those most in need of educational reform (Probe, 1999; Rose and Adedabu, 2007; Srivastava and Walford, 2007; Watkins, 2004). This concern is heightened by the fact that non-government schools (no matter how low their tuition) reserve the right to select and expel students, which is often not accorded to their public school counterparts. While it is unlikely that parents with exceptionally low, or no, income would be able to afford tuition fees at even the lowest-cost private schools, private education is often touted by proponents as more efficient than the public system, which allows for the implementation of innovative initiatives to accommodate those who cannot afford the fees on their own. Specifically, loans,

² While the land requirement precludes private school owners from registering schools with the Ministry of Education, land issues have also had a limiting role in the number of public schools that have been established in slum areas.

scholarships and vouchers can be used to increase access to private schools for low-income children (Wolff et al., 2005). To some extent, one or more of these approaches can be found in nearly all countries with a thriving low-cost private school sector.

In Ghana, for example, Tooley and Dixon (2006) found that approximately 5 percent of students in Ga were offered concessionary spaces in private schools. Additionally, 23 of 26 schools visited for the Ghana fieldwork noted that a proportion of their students attended for free. Ultimately in Ghana, with the largest cost in private schools coming from school feeding programs, simply covering lunch costs could greatly increase the reach of low-cost private schools. These costs could be born by the government, the local community or aid organizations, depending on what type of scheme is implemented.

In an effort to ensure that all students have the ability to enroll in non-government schools if they should so choose, the Government of Indonesia instituted a plan to relieve all poor students of fees by offering school operational funds (BOS) to private schools. In practice, some schools are unable to cover all their costs with BOS funds and therefore end up charging fees or asking for donations despite the regulations. However, these schools almost invariably allow students to enroll even if they cannot afford to pay any fees or make any donations.

Non-government schools in Kenya, Jamaica and Tanzania were also found to provide concessions and/or scholarships to those unable to afford school fees. In Jamaica, these concessions are most likely to be provided by schools with external funding assistance, such as churches or other religious organizations. In both Kenya and Tanzania, scholarships from low-cost private schools are regularly provided to AIDS orphans. In Kenya, repurposing of fees is also a common practice. For example, a number of schools from our fieldwork were found to accept a certain number of free students for every few fee-paying students they were able to enroll. Although the range of concessions and scholarships varied, nearly all schools visited in the case study countries provided concessionary or reduced-fee spaces to students most in need.

During their research in India Tooley and Dixon (2005) found that while the schools they visited often had low tuitions, they still offered scholarships or concessionary spaces to those most in need. Offering a slightly different approach, Kisira (2008) notes that in Uganda, parents can pay for private schools in kind (such as by maize), which increases the ability of households with low and/or inconsistent income to afford private schools.

2.3.2. Vouchers and alternative models

In addition to scholarships and subsidies, some governments have implemented voucher programs to help low-income students attend private schools. The most well-known example is Chile, which boasts the largest voucher program in the developing world. While this program has been used to provide many poor students with the means to enroll in schools that they could not otherwise afford, the fact that the size of the vouchers does not vary by SES makes them regressive—ultimately limiting their potential impact (Peirano and Vargas, 2005). A similar scenario exists in Cote d'Ivoire, where subsidies are provided to students at a rate that is negotiated with schools, though they are loosely tied to the number of students enrolled. Since sponsorship qualifications are based on test scores, those in the highest economic quintile were found to receive a subsidy more than twice that of students in the lowest economic quintile (Sakellariou and Patrinos, 2004). Voucher programs have also been implemented in Colombia and Cameroon. The well-documented PACES program in Colombia has been found to have produced mixed results, with some researchers concluding that the application process limited the voucher's ability to be extended to the poorest students in voucher cities (Angrist et al., 2002; Uribe et al., 2006). For example,

Kremer (2002) notes that many of the voucher recipients in Colombia were planning to enroll in private school regardless. As for Cameroon, the government provided per-student subsidies to faith-based private schools for enrolling low-income students (Backiny-Yetna and Wodon, 2009b). Bangladesh implemented a restricted subsidy program at the secondary level, where the government subsidies were used to cover approximately 80 percent of teachers' salaries in non-government schools (Gauri and Vawda, 2004). The aim of the program was that by reducing the burden on schools they would be able to enroll more low-income students. There are no available data, however, on the ultimate impact of this program.

One of the more innovative approaches taken in recent years involves a slight departure from the voucher system. Some governments have taken to purchasing private school spaces. We discovered this in Jamaica, for example. This has also occurred in both the Philippines, where the government has purchased places in low-income private schools (Patrinos, 2006), and in Trinidad and Tobago (Kitaev, 2004). Finally, the Colombian government purchased private school seats briefly after the completion of the PACES voucher program—although the government's newest approach is to contract out to 'concessionary schools'. These private schools are to be run by successful educational management organizations and are required to accept all interested students from the lowest two socio-economic quintiles (Villa and Duarte, 2005). They have been found to have lower dropout rates than similar public schools. In fact, public schools located near them have lower drop out rates than public schools located further away, which provides evidence of the positive externalities of competition. And school test scores in these 'concession schools' are equal to or higher than test scores in public schools (Barrera-Osorio, 2009, p. 195).

In conclusion, there is evidence of non-government schools accommodating low-income children from all countries studied. Through concessionary spaces for AIDS orphans and streetchildren, scholarships for girls, cross-subsidization policies and alternative frameworks, private schools have often been able to provide educational opportunities to children from the neediest of backgrounds, some of whom have been turned away from the public system.

2.4. Regulatory environment

It is natural that the public would be concerned with the educational environment in non-government schools for the poor. The students are citizens and their welfare is important. Hence all governments have rules and regulations pertaining to the establishment, operations and results of non-government schools. That said, it is also true that the virtues of non-government schools include the flexibility to experiment and provide education in a manner free of the standardization of large and bureaucratic systems. We believe that the ideal is one of balance between the need to protect and the need for flexibility.

2.4.1. Regulatory variety

Although the need for balance is common across countries, the solution is far from standard. For instance, the requirements that a non-government school must meet to open in Tanzania include a declaration of ownership, a mission statement, a completed application, a certificate from the DEO engineering office, a certificate from the DEO health office, proof of land ownership, approval of architectural plans, and a report from the school inspector's office. When it is operational, the Tanzanian government also places limits on class size, teacher qualifications, student teacher ratios, teaching and learning materials, the number of school days per year, student registration and well as curriculum

and examination of results. Tuition restrictions are placed on non-government schools in Pakistan, Indonesia and Ghana. Requirements for land ownership are also evident in Kenya and Pakistan. Rules on teacher qualifications exist in Ghana, Tanzania, Jamaica, Pakistan and Kenya. In all six countries, private schools are required to follow the national (or government approved) curriculum.

Sometimes non-government schools are the recipients of public support. In Indonesia, the government provides schools with operational funding, which is often used to pay the salaries of teachers in non-government schools. In the case of Jamaica, the government provides occasional support for professional development of school proprietors and teachers. In Kenya, the government provides occasional support with government textbooks.

2.4.2. Regulatory concerns

The regulatory environment for non-government schools accommodating the poor can represent barriers to their operations. These include regulations which are (i) unnecessarily numerous: where the number and variety of regulations would prevent private schools operations were they to be followed (example: Tanzania); (ii) unnecessarily restrictive in content: where a single regulation can prevent operations (example: the requirement to own land in Kenya); (iii) unenforced: where the regulations are simply on paper and cannot be monitored (example: Ghana), or (iv) used as an opportunity for graft and corruption: where the regulations serve as a means for public officials to 'collect rent,' implying that when they are enforced it is for the private gain of the government inspector (example: the general rule).

2.5. Financial sustainability

Without a public source of income are non-government schools likely to continue operating? In theory, non-government schools can obtain income from tuition fees, the school proprietor (and his/her family), an institutional sponsor, an endowment or the government. In reality private schools for the poor have only the first and at times the second from which to draw. Economic theory would suggest that increased demand would cause schools to act like businesses and raise tuition levels to maximize income/profits. This does not appear to be the case in any of the countries in which private schools serve the poor. Some schools drew on the pension of the founder or from the founder's profits from commercial activity, providing evidence that these schools were acting more like charities or philanthropic institutions. For instance, in more than half the schools visited in Jamaica, the school director either declined pay altogether or received a salary lower than the teachers. This was common in Kenya as well. In almost every school, some of the students could pay less than the tuition rate and often nothing at all. Such students were allowed to remain enrolled, with their cost covered by cross-subsidization from those who could pay. In Tanzania school income was supplemented by student activities in baking or agriculture. In Indonesia, the private school sector, though poor, was healthier financially because of regular contributions by the public sector.

Due to their inconsistent incomes, the dependence on tuition from low-income families inevitably places non-government schools at constant risk of bankruptcy. Although not witnessed in the case study schools, this risk puts pressure on school directors that may lead them to seek short-term loans to cover operating expenses at high rates of interest—many of which would be taken without making a contribution to school infrastructure.

2.5.1. Taxation

The tax structure in some countries poses another threat to financial sustainability. There is often little distinction between a for-profit enterprise and a non-profit enterprise. Typical education legislation will permit the high-end private schools, often established originally by the Anglican or Catholic churches, to be declared single non-profit institutions, but low-income non-government schools (still non-profit) are often treated as if they were the same as a textile mill or a bottling company. In Tanzania, for instance, all school fees are taxed as if they are profits. In Jamaica, private schools were supposed to receive a waiver from the General Consumption Tax (like a value added tax), but none of the principals interviewed were aware of their waiver, hence all paid a GCT as if they were private businesses.

In conclusion, ultimately low-cost non-government schools in five of the six case study countries rely heavily on tuition (the exception being Indonesia). Combined with inconsistent government and donor support, and concerns about taxation, many low-cost non-government schools in these countries are likely at risk with regard to long-term financial sustainability. This concern is further compounded by the inability of schools to provide sufficient collateral for obtaining private loans.

2.6. Quality of output

One of the main underlying reasons for the expansion of low-cost non-government schools in developing countries is the poor quality of public schools. In order for parents to decide to spend their income on private schools, there must be an assumption on their part that private schools will provide higher-quality services and better educational opportunities to their children (assuming that the private school is, in fact, more expensive than a public school). While perceived quality is important, what evidence exists regarding the quality of outputs in the private sector chosen over the government system?

Although data are lacking in Jamaica, there is some evidence regarding the quality of educational outputs in low-cost preparatory schools. With smaller class sizes and more individualized attention but less qualified teachers, the private schools visited for our fieldwork boasted high passage rates on national examinations, which were at least on a par with their nearby public school counterparts. We also found similar results in Ghana in terms of data constraints, class size, teacher qualifications and national examination scores. While exam rates in some low-cost private schools were found to be higher than in public schools, fewer than half the private schools visited for the Ghana fieldwork actually administered the Basic Education Certificate Examination. That raises concerns about the quality of these schools. However, based on work conducted in the Ga district, [Tooley and Dixon \(2005\)](#) found that raw test scores for private school students (in both registered and unregistered schools) were higher than their public school counterparts in mathematics, English and religious/moral education. It is important to note, however, that raw test scores can be illustrative but do not account for the fact that there are likely to be differences between those who choose to enroll in private schools and those who decide to remain in the (failing) public system. [Tooley and Dixon](#) offer that there is forthcoming work that uses a Heckman selection procedure to account for selection bias but results are not yet available.

As for Tanzania, studies have shown that private schools as a whole have produced positive achievements but none of this evidence provides information about the low-cost sector of interest ([Cox and Jimenez, 1990](#); [Lassibille and Tan, 2003](#); [Tan and Sumra, 2000](#)). In fact, anecdotal evidence from the Tanzania fieldwork shows that the private school effect is accounted for by wealthy private schools, while low-cost private schools are

actually of poor quality. Similarly in Indonesia, low-fee schools for the poor sometimes provide greater access than the public sector but concerns are often raised about their quality (King, 1997). The results of empirical studies over the past 15 years have been mixed. Although many studies have shown that public schools yield high-quality inputs (such as teacher training and textbooks), this has not always resulted in public school advantages with regard to outputs (Newhouse and Beegle, 2006; Strauss et al., 2004; World Bank, 1998). For example, a recent Decentralizing Basic Education study found that private schools were able to provide achievement results that were similar to public schools, with fewer resources and less qualified teachers (DBE, 2010). These findings supported previous results obtained by James et al. (1996), as well as Bedi and Garg (2000). However, contradictory evidence was found in analyses conducted by Fahmi (2009) and Newhouse and Beegle (2006), both of which provided evidence for the relative achievement gains in public schools.

In Pakistan, several studies have been conducted to assess the state of non-government education, which found that lower teacher absenteeism and smaller class sizes were some of their greatest assets (Alderman et al., 2001; Andrabi et al., 2008). As far as school output is concerned, Das et al. (2006) found private school students had higher test score results in mathematics, Urdu and English (after accounting for observable characteristics). Additionally, Asadullah (2009) found that private school students had future earnings advantages over public school students. Despite these findings, however, a Save the Children study ultimately concluded that while parents perceive private schools to be of higher quality than government schools, “on balance, children in private education institutions in Nepal and Pakistan are not provided with the quality of education as defined within the CRC³” (Save the Children, 2002, p. 8).

Much like the results in each of the five previously discussed case study countries, the findings in Kenya point to a mixed quality of output measures in low-income private schools. These mixed results likely result from the balance between purportedly higher-quality inputs (such as smaller class sizes and lower teacher absenteeism) and lower-quality inputs (such as infrastructure and teacher qualifications). Tooley and Dixon (2005) ultimately found that private school students from slums in Kenya scored better in math and Kiswahili than their public school counterparts but performed more poorly in English. Accordingly, based on our field research (conceding a limited sample), we found that low-cost private schools regularly boasted of Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education exam passage rates at levels equal to (or better than) the public schools that were opted out. Preliminary evidence on Bridge International Academy schools also points to higher reading scores for private school students. Earlier work by Mark Bray, however, found that private schools in Kenya were of inferior quality (although this was mostly in terms of teachers and facilities) (Bray, 1997).

2.7. Successful initiatives and models

Based on the mixed results regarding the quality of outputs relative to public schools, as well as the degree to which non-government schools accommodate low-income students, it is difficult to point to an exemplary initiative or model that effectively maximizes both of these criteria. This is not to say that non-government schooling has not expanded access to basic schooling or that promising approaches have not been developed. Each of the case study countries provides some evidence of non-government schooling initiatives or models that, if implemented

correctly, could be used to assist countries in meeting their EFA goals. It is assumed that the context of origin is an important criterion of success and that transferring that elsewhere involves risk. However with that understanding the most innovative and/or promising initiatives are discussed below.

2.7.1. Cross-subsidization

One productive strategy that was implemented in several schools in Kenya involves the re-purposing of funds. In order to maximize access to private schooling for those who are most in need, some Kenyan schools adopted the practice of enrolling one or two students at no charge for every three or four fee-paying students enrolled. In theory, this is an innovative way of expanding access. The danger with this practice is that most of these schools rely fully on tuition and fees for all school costs and are therefore jeopardizing their eventual financial sustainability. With additional funding support, however, a model such as this could prove extremely successful.

2.7.2. School-in-a-box

Additionally in Kenya, work is being done by Bridge International Academies, a private equity-owned company that seeks to provide high-quality, low-cost private primary education. Bridge International's goal is to educate ‘at scale, ‘with a focus on sustainability and accountability to parents and communities. The company has employed a franchise approach to the development of it is calling “school in-a-box,” which costs under \$4/month per student. The package includes a scripted curriculum, teacher/management training and all necessary educational facilities/materials. The process of starting a school begins with the purchase of land (generally untitled land in slums), followed by the building of a school, which costs approximately \$2000 per classroom, ‘fully-loaded’. Bridge International Academies has approximately 100 employees (95 percent of whom are Kenyan citizens), including those involved in real estate, school construction, and pedagogy. Bridge International recruits and trains a local school manager, as well as local teachers, all of whom must have at least completed secondary education. The manager has a ‘performance contract’ in the sense that he or she may begin with a salary of \$1000/year and may, with good performance over many years, end up with a salary six times the original level. After training, schools open for operation. The entire process can take as little as five months from the procurement of land to the opening of the school. Much of the support and financial measures are centralized, with payments to schools and teachers occurring mostly via mobile phone.

While the concept of “school in-a-box” is not new, there are several aspects of Bridge's approach that seem promising. Arguably the most important aspect is the land ownership/purchasing assistance provided to schools in poor areas. In a country rife with property rights issues, it is important to make sure that all measures have been taken to ensure a school's legitimacy. While the issue happens to be land in Kenya, the idea is transferable. In other words, programs that focus on the “big picture” by providing services that go beyond the doors of the schoolhouse have the potential to be useful to the low-cost private sector. Bridge International provides such services in the form of management training as well. As an added bonus, these services can be provided for as little as \$4/month per student. Ultimately, the success of this program has yet to be determined (and Bridge International has its fair share of challenges) but the approach appears promising.

2.7.3. Scholarship programs

In Pakistan, the pilot program established in the Balochistan Province proved beneficial for increasing access to girls' education—which is something that is greatly needed in many countries

³ Convention on the Rights of the Child. For an explanation of the CRC's measures, see CRC Article 29.

in order for them to attain their EFA goals. By providing scholarships to all girls' schools that have been established through local efforts, the Balochistan project ultimately showed that overcoming the obstacle of access to education for girls from low-income families is not an insurmountable task. While this project focused specifically on girls, scholarship programs have been found to be successful in other settings (with other student populations) as well. In Tanzania and Kenya, for example, low-cost private schools have been able to enroll AIDS orphans who were unable to afford public schools due to the hidden costs in the public system. Similar scholarships have been provided to street children in Kenya, as well as low-income students in Jamaica, Ghana, India and many Latin American countries (Tooley and Dixon, 2005; Wolff et al., 2005).

In conclusion, several successful initiatives have been discussed in this section: cross-subsidization, "school-in-a-box", scholarship programs, and vouchers and concessionary schools. However, all of these programs have shortcomings. While these programs and models can be beneficial in developing alternative financing schemes for low-cost private schools, there is currently no simple solution or silver bullet available to address financial sustainability and quality concerns currently facing much of the low-cost private sector in the majority of developing countries.

3. Conclusions

While all case study countries have unnecessarily numerous and restrictive policies/regulations regarding private schools, there are several factors that have more serious implications than others. Having tuition fee limits or fee increase limits (such as in Kenya and Ghana) completely undermines the inherent benefit of a private education sector. If schools are unable to set their own fees based on market forces, the financial sustainability of the sector is put in peril. However, because teacher certification has not been associated with better teaching and learning, regulations governing teacher certification works counter to the need for flexibility and efficiency in the non-government sector.

Although the Kenyan government has adopted recent policies to improve the non-government education sector, by restricting certain programming (such as low-income grants) to public school students the government is limiting the ultimate impact of the private sector. Since the government appears aware of the need for non-government support, it must be willing to treat low-income private schools as complementary to the public sector. Taxation policies in Kenya (as well as in several other countries) also run counter to the government's claims that the non-government sector is important. Furthermore, land ownership requirements preclude private schools in the country from registering as schools with the Ministry of Education. These policies must be changed if the non-government sector is to be expected to play a major role in assisting the country to meet its EFA goals.

Of all the case study countries, Jamaica appears to have the policies most conducive to expansion of a successful low-cost private education sector, based on the government's recognition of and support for the sector. These efforts will be significantly strengthened by the passage of a new policy on independent schools. This does not mean, however, that all policies are working in favor of the private sector. For example, taxation of non-profit schools and overly burdensome regulations (without any government support) are imposing constraints on the private sector that have proven difficult to overcome. Without changes to these policies, the government's strong efforts to encourage the low-cost preparatory sector in the country could ultimately prove unsuccessful.

3.1. Accommodation of low-income students

It is accurate to associate private schools with wealthier families. In every country this association is valid, but in no country is it adequate. In every country we studied and in those covered by the extensive literature, low-income families were found trying to place their children in non-government schools. Surprisingly, the difference in cost between a free public school and a low-tuition private school is modest (or even negligible) in some countries, while the difference in output can at times be substantial. For instance, as reported above in Ghana, the cost of sending a child to an unregistered private school is 12 percent of the minimum wage. The cost at a registered private school is 20 percent of the minimum wage. And the cost of sending a child to a free public school (where the private cost of uniforms, etc. is still significant) is 16 percent of the minimum wage. In this instance, it may be less expensive for a low-income family to send its child to an unregistered private school, and it may be more cost-effective to send its child to a registered private school.

While the cost-effectiveness for low-income families is certainly an important motivation, it is not necessarily the only one.⁴ In three of the countries we studied (Tanzania, Jamaica, and Kenya), non-government schools often carried concessionary spaces, those occupied by children without families (such as street children and AIDS orphans) or from families that could not pay the full tuition, or in many cases could not pay any tuition. In Jamaica and Kenya, like at a high-cost university in North America, tuition is often used to cross-subsidize those who cannot pay and the schools themselves operate as miniature social service agencies. The fact that this is so common suggests that education policy experts need to alter their understanding of the definition of a private school. While many in fact operate on behalf of more wealthy families, others commonly do the opposite.

3.2. Financial sustainability

Private schools that accommodate low-income families are inevitably at risk of financial failure. They depend heavily on tuition or income from the founder (pensions, church donations, etc.). They often must accept tuition in kind (a family's farm produce or labor). They are often overly dependent on a single charismatic founder. Because they are fiscally a major risk, banks and other lending institutions are reluctant to engage them in long-term planning or investment. In addition, they sometimes face a tax and regulatory structure that is administratively counter-productive to fiscal stability. Although potentially more extreme than some countries might be willing to implement, the Indonesian model of providing all private schools with operational funding could be used to alleviate some of the fiscal concerns of low-cost private schools.

3.3. Regulatory environments

While it is natural to seek to protect children attending non-government schools, the number and variety of regulations are commonly overly cumbersome, unnecessarily restrictive, unenforced, and used as an opportunity to collect 'rents' (bribes). The requirement that a school must own land prevents hundreds of thousands of children in Nairobi's Mathare slum from gaining access to school. The requirement that teachers must be licensed or that classes must be of a certain size unnecessarily restricts a school's creativity and flexibility. Upper limits on tuition restrict a school's ability to cross-subsidize. Requirements that governments

⁴ Cost-effectiveness is irrelevant to those without a choice (i.e., orphans, street children, and those who depend upon places financed by charity).

annually inspect or audit, strains the credibility of the state's role. Whenever adherence to official regulations becomes managerially impossible, the level of graft and corruption increases. In other words, improper and unrealistic regulations create dishonesty and disrespect for the agency ostensibly responsible for the protection of children.

On the other hand, a completely 'free market' in primary and secondary education would be neither justified nor feasible; regulations are required. The key question is how to effectively regulate without placing counter-productive constraints on flexibility and creativity, the essential elements in the non-government school sector. We offer suggestions in the section below on recommendations.

3.4. Quality of non-government school output

As described in Section 2.6, we find mixed evidence on whether the quality of outputs by non-government schools for the poor is better than other categories of schools. In some instances the low-cost private sector has been found to produce outputs of poor quality, whereas in other instances the low-cost private sector's output has far exceeded that of government schools. It is therefore impossible to generalize regarding the superiority of non-government schools. However, some characteristics appear to be the norm in non-government schools that we studied. The non-government schools we visited were able to offer religious as well as intellectual support. They were often very personal institutions, with administrators familiar with each child's name and personal history. We found they have small class sizes, a characteristic highly appreciated by parents; and they are able to provide individualized instruction, as well as individualized attention.⁵ We also found that parents and families are highly supportive, and mention 'how close' they feel to the principal and to what the school is aiming to do. We found that teachers are treated as professionals, are expected to be present at all times; and to work far beyond the expectations of their relatively low compensation. Further, we found that teachers possess low formal quality in terms of certification but high quality in terms of dedication and effectiveness. We found considerable flexibility in the class schedule, with many schools operating in the early morning, late afternoons, weekends, and summer holidays to ensure the child's success and the parent's professional convenience. Could improvements in the public sector satisfy the demand for the private sector? From an economic point of view, regardless of whether non-government schools are more effective (even if they are simply on a par with public schools), it would cost the government and aid agencies less to support private initiatives than it would to increase public infrastructure. As important, non-government schools provide a service that will be unavailable to publicly operated schools.

In conclusion, we found that to reduce the discussion of output quality to standardized test scores is inadequate and that non-government schools in all six countries were performing very well on non-academic outcomes.

4. Recommendations

We find that non-government schools serving the poor are a universal phenomenon but that they are not always recognized as such. Governments sometimes ignore them, deny their contributions, or characterize them as being of low quality and impediments to national educational objectives. Although we are not claiming that focus needs to be moved away from the public sector,

⁵ The difference is important. Individualized instruction concerns the learning of the curriculum; individualized attention concerns attention to a child's self concept, sense of purpose, as well as the child's physical and emotional health.

our recommendation is that non-government schools serving the poor be treated as an integral part of achieving the objectives of basic Education for All. It should be seen as a welcomed complement to an often over-burdened public system. We suggest three areas—statistics, the regulatory environment and interventions—where new attention could be focused in order to assist countries in meeting their Education for All goals.

4.1. Registering non-government schools

- Non-government schools should be registered without charge⁶ and included in the national education databases. This information (school names and locations, at a minimum) should be made available to parents who are interested in an alternative to the public system.
- Ministries of Education should assign specialized staff to help collect and incorporate statistics on non-government schools.

4.2. Regulations governing non-government schools

- Regulations are clearly justified on curriculum objectives, completion, or admissions tests for further education, and health or safety
- Other regulations should be reduced or eliminated, hence enabling maximum flexibility. This should include regulations that control tuition, regulate teacher certification, and pedagogy. Innovation depends on freedom to experiment in these areas.⁷
- For reasons of the public interest, and because non-profit non-government schools should be free of taxation, high tuition schools should reserve a portion of their places for scholarships to children with considerable ability from low-income families.

4.3. Interventions

We can offer no single answer to the question of how to create self-sustainable low-cost private schools for the poor. The best thing to do is to be pragmatic. Countries should deliver education through a wide variety of mechanisms, public and private. There are, however, specific areas of intervention that appear immediately promising:

- Where programs already exist of cash transfers or other assistance to families or children of the poor that are delivered through government schools, these should be extended to the children of the poor who attend non-government schools.
- Publicly financed programs in non-government schools should be expanded on specific grounds and justified on the basis that the public system cannot at the current time effectively accommodate these specific needs. These grounds may include a lack of public supply of secondary education (e.g., Jamaica); children with specific learning needs; orphans, street children (e.g., Kenya) and children with considerable ability from low-income homes who deserve a better opportunity (e.g., Pakistan, Ghana). In considering this recommendation we have closely considered the one made by Oketch et al. (2010a) suggesting that governments should differentiate their assistance to children of the poor in public schools. Our view is that this is unrealistic. Governments that have difficulty delivering even minimum quality standards cannot be expected to effectively differentiate the assistance to particular children.

⁶ Registration may be 'temporary' until new schools can be accredited; but restrictions should not prevent new schools from registering.

⁷ The evidence on the effectiveness of teacher certification is mixed, at best. While the state can require certification in public schools, judgment on teacher quality in private schools should be a function of the school.

- Incentives should be enhanced so non-government schools can better manage themselves. These may include better public information on school quality (through systems of rating); viable capital markets to improve the effectiveness of lending institutions; less onerous regulations; as well as direct training of school managers, administrators and associations that represent non-government schools.

5. Implications

In the introduction we mentioned six major arguments against the use of non-government schools to achieve universal basic education: (i) that basic education is a human right that only states can deliver; (ii) that non-subsidized providers depend on community revenue; (iii) that claims of greater efficiency can only be true under conditions of informed choice, accountability, and an effective regulatory framework; (iv) that no OECD country depended on non-government schooling to achieve universal basic schooling; (v) that relying on private schools can undermine the public system; and (vi) that low-cost private schools will never be able to accommodate the poorest households.

In our view, the state will remain the basic conduit for education; it will remain the final arbiter of what children need to learn to become citizens. The state will also remain the main (though never the sole) source of education finance. Lastly the state will remain a major though never the sole provider of schooling. On the other hand, our experience suggests that these conclusions are inadequate to summarize what should occur regarding non-government schools for the poor in the provision of Education for All.

The state should provide a national curriculum because it is natural for nations to influence the behavior of future adult citizens. States might well set the standards for entry into selective public secondary and tertiary education. However, non-government schools should not be confined to the national curriculum since curricular experimentation is essential to educational development. As long as students in non-government schools pass the national examinations at the end of primary and secondary school the balance of their curriculum should be an institutional decision. One purpose of having a national curriculum is to lower the risk of curricular extremism in non-government schools, including religious schools. The teaching of values that abrogate national standards of tolerance and empathy toward fellow citizens or political neighbors can be a significant problem and the state has the right to ensure a social consensus consistent with United Nations civic education standards.

Countries differ in their ability to deliver public services. The director of the country forecasting services in the Economist Intelligence Unit, for instance, categorizes states (high, moderate, low and very low) on their ability to deliver public services (Kekic, 2011, p. 90). All of the states struggling to achieve Education for All are among those categorized as being low or very low in the ability to deliver public services. With respect to human rights, we reach a different conclusion from that of Lewin (2007). We do not believe that human rights imply that the state should provide public schooling. As we have visited effective non-government schools serving the poor, often within countries where the public school system is not well regarded, we see little that guarantees that public provision of schooling will be more equitable or effective. In states that are weak in the delivery of public services we think it may be an abrogation of human rights if low-income families in low-income states are denied the freedom to seek their own educational solutions for their children. In other words, we believe a state monopoly on the delivery of a public service may be contrary to human rights, particularly when there is ample evidence of state inadequacy in that delivery. We conclude as

Ahmed and Govinda (2010) do: “the reality is that a public system is not necessarily the most responsive to the circumstances and needs of the participants and not invariably equitable, and a democratic polity cannot banish diversity in basic education provision” (p. 327).

With respect to the argument that resources required for non-government schooling draw resources away from low-income communities, we once again disagree in the absolute sense (although we do find merit in the concern). Revenues are fungible. Tax resources draw from communities, as do private school fees. One strength of this argument comes from the fact that many people in poorer communities of developing countries often operate in the informal economy. This is distinctly true of many people residing in the slums of Nairobi, for example. In situations such as these, taxes for public schooling would likely come from those who participate in the formal economy (i.e., relatively wealthier families), while the private school costs for low-fee schools would be covered solely by poorer parents. However, as we have noted throughout this paper, there are a wide variety of reasons why parents choose to enroll their children in non-government schools and it is difficult to maintain that low-income communities should be prohibited from choosing to allocate personal resources to the educational ends of their choice. Hence we cannot fully support the notion that private schools unnecessarily draw resources away from low-income communities.

Our experience is consistent with the proposition that for non-government schools to be more efficient than government schools, there must be good sources of information and an effective regulatory framework. Hence we agree that this condition is essential for the non-government sector to be effective. Under recommendations (above) we discussed how to improve the public’s access to education information. In terms of regulations, however, it is our experience that the framework needs considerable improvement so that it does not just serve as a barrier for private school entry (as discussed in the recommendations, above).

As to the history of non-government schools contributing to the acquisition of universal schooling, our experience would lead us to a slightly different conclusion from Lewin (2007). Most OECD countries achieved universal education with a mixture of government and non-government schooling, and today there is no OECD country without non-government schooling. In fact, in some OECD countries, such as Japan and Korea, non-government supplementary education is the norm rather than the exception. Precedents set by the socialist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where schooling was delivered solely by the government, shifted as soon as they had the opportunity. In former socialist states non-government schooling is now a normal source of education. Furthermore, while it was once true that there was a great disparity between private enrolments in developing versus OECD countries, there has been a convergence in the aggregate in recent years. Ultimately, we reject the notion that universal enrollment in OECD countries was achieved without the assistance of non-government schooling.

With regard to the fifth argument, we agree that there are instances when relying on private schools can undermine the public education system. In many cases in Latin America, the non-government primary system is the normal educational venue for the wealthy and the public system the normal one for everyone else. This lowers the school’s impact on social cohesion and tends to exacerbate problems of social stratification.

But the opposite can also be true: there are instances when the non-government system—with its emphasis on individualized instruction and personal attention—can help improve the public system. We found numerous instances of non-government schools accommodating children of the very poorest component of the community. One needs to keep in mind that there are many

categories of non-government schools. There are those that provide education for orphans of parents who died of AIDS, those managed by churches or other charitable organizations, others offer schooling as a last resort to those who cannot gain access to publicly provided schooling regardless of whether it is classified as free of cost. While it is true that fees will always be too high for some families, there is evidence from many countries that private schools are reaching the poorest children, many of whom have been turned away from the public sector.

In essence, while these arguments against non-government schools have their merits, the issue is not so black and white. Ultimately, we found evidence to both support and belie each of these concerns. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that our experience suggests the non-government school sector is a permanently important contributor to Basic Education-for-All and thus has implications for each of the main multilateral and bilateral institutions with Education for All objectives.

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