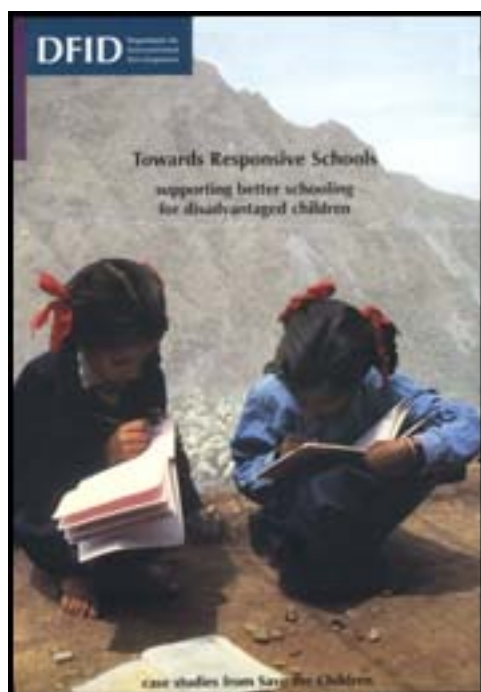


Towards Responsive Schools Supporting Better Schooling for Disadvantaged Children - Education Research Paper No. 38, 2000, 270 p.



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case studies from Save the Children

DFID Department for International Development

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Save the Children

DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION PAPERS

This is one of a series of Education Papers issued from time to time by the Education Department of the Department For International Development. Each paper represents a

study or piece of commissioned research on some aspect of education and training in developing countries. Most of the studies were undertaken in order to provide informed judgements from which policy decisions could be drawn, but in each case it has become apparent that the material produced would be of interest to a wider audience, particularly those whose work focuses on developing countries.

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We are part of the International Save the Children Alliance, which aims to be a truly international movement for children.

For further details contact Save the Children UK at 17 Grove Lane, London, SE5 8RD or telephone 0207 703 5400.

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Preface

This publication brings together case studies from the experience of Save the Children in nine countries, four in Africa, three in Asia, and one each in the Middle East and Latin America. It is a contribution to debates on how to improve the quality of primary education in countries where resources are limited, and where problems of schooling link with issues of poverty and social or political disadvantage.

The audience

The people we hope will find something of value in these studies include policy makers and others who work on education issues - in universities, community groups, policy makers in national Ministries of Education, international development agencies, and donor agencies. Representatives from all of these came together at the start of the 1990s in a World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, and with great energy launched the Education for All decade, declaring that by the year 2000 all children of school age would be receiving a basic education. Ten years later, at the time these studies are being published, a new series of conferences is taking place, to face up to the depressing fact that not only has this target not been achieved, but there are more children not in school now than a decade ago.

These studies deal with the situations where children get the worst deal from education systems. But they are not primarily concerned with numbers. Save the Children and many others who are concerned about children's education see a more fundamental problem facing education policy makers: the fact that there has been a disastrous drop in the *quality* of the school experience. In the poorest countries, and also in the poorer communities in countries that in gross income terms are not considered poor, worsening economic conditions and the pressure to get ever larger numbers of children into already overstrained school systems has created a situation where in many places the school experience has become so dysfunctional as to be damaging to children. How can education planners begin to reverse this negative spiral?

The original goals of the Education for All decade focused on quality of education as well as enrolments of children. These studies are being published as world leaders review their commitments to Education for All at the World Conference on Education in Senegal. Governments have an opportunity to place the quality of education at the

heart of their plans for education in the new century. We hope that these case studies will play a role in clarifying what quality education means in practice.

The questions

Our aim has been to consider what an international development agency can do to help improve schooling for disadvantaged groups of children. First, what are the factors that structure educational disadvantage? And secondly, are there things an international agency can do to support governments, local organisations and communities to overcome these problems? What kinds of roles have international agencies taken? Which of these are potentially effective?

We consider these questions through an analysis of selected examples of the work of Save the Children (UK), drawn from experience of work on education in over fifty countries. The studies give an insight into problems of schooling in some of the world's poorest countries, among groups of children whose needs are neglected by current school systems - in other words, at the point where education delivery is least effective.

Where a consensus emerges across studies, this can be taken to represent the collective approach of Save the Children across a diverse range of contexts of disadvantage; overall, therefore, the book can be seen as a case study of the diversity of one international agency's activity in education. There is no suggestion that the approaches analysed here are more worthy of study than those of other organisations. They are offered merely as examples of ways of tackling problems that have been found useful in difficult contexts. We hope their publication will stimulate others to share their experience.

The title ***Towards Responsive Schools*** reflects the central conclusion: that one of the main things that can be done to improve schooling for disadvantaged children is to encourage school providers to be more responsive - to the particular needs of children in each situation, to the challenges of changing external conditions, and to the community of school users who have much to offer to the educational process. The case studies reflect a range of different challenges, but in all of them Save the Children's efforts have been directed towards encouraging greater responsiveness.

THE PROCESS

The project experimented with an approach that stands in contrast to the 'extractive' research model in which, in its extreme form, a highly trained western academic researches an issue in a poor country, and publishes the results for an audience which excludes the local people who were the source of the information and have the greatest interest in understanding what has been learnt. While conscientious researchers would

now commonly make efforts to avoid this extreme approach, we are in practice often structured into it despite our best intentions, by the imbalance of educational and funding opportunities between 'north' and 'south'.

The participants

In this project a determined effort was made to give a voice to local understandings of problems, often already clearly articulated but by people who seldom have direct access to an international audience. We were in an advantageous position to be able to do so, since the body of material being considered was the programme experience of an international NGO, and the obvious central contributors were nationals of the countries concerned who have managed these programmes. Their understandings are not based on theoretical study but on years of struggling with these problems in their work as staff in Save the Children, or in the organisations with whom it works.

The tasks of analysis and writing were supported by a London based editorial team. Since many of the contributors had not previously conducted systematic analysis or written for an audience outside their country, one member of the editorial team was allocated to assist with the writing up of each study, and to act as 'editor', a role which involved balancing the perceptions of many individuals. Since the intention was to reflect the diversity and individuality of contributors' points of view, the resulting studies vary considerably in style, length and emphasis. The 'Editors' Conclusions' at the end of each study highlight points that particularly contributed to our overall understanding of the issues.

The results are being returned to participant contributors through a series of experience-sharing workshops, and the publication in several languages of a handbook for practitioners.

Defining the research framework

An initial overview of experience was conducted by requesting short 'theme papers' from countries where Save the Children has experience in education, on any issue which staff in that country considered critical to the education of children in disadvantaged groups. Fifty papers were generated, which were then analysed over a two-week period by a working group made up of two representatives from each of five continents, one a national staff member and one with experience of work across countries. This provided a clarified framework of Save the Children's principles and practice in education, which was written up by two members of the editorial team and published as a short handbook, *A Chance in Life (1998)*.

From this collective analysis the central hypothesis emerged, that a critical contribution

an international agency could make was to support local/national groups or systems to develop more responsive forms of schooling. The aim then was to investigate through case studies the process by which such approaches had been developed.

Local research/analysis

An invitation to conduct a study was offered to all countries that had contributed to the overview. The selection was made on the following criteria:

- ***Relevance to current education debates:*** a difficult context, and an issue relevant beyond that country;
- ***Depth of experience:*** from a country where Save the Children has been working long enough to provide a useful example to analyse;
- ***Competence to produce a useful case study:*** availability of local contributors able to generate sufficient material to form the basis of a publishable study.

Each study required a thoughtful review, ***by participants***, of how Save the Children has attempted to support improved education for disadvantaged children, and what has been learnt from this. The form of review varied in each country but the processes can be loosely grouped in two:

- In Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali and Peru a review process was set up. Participants included children, parents, community members, teachers, workers in local organisations, education officials, employers, academics and international agency representatives. The process was led by nationals of that country who had a historical view of the programme.
- In Mongolia, Mozambique and Pakistan a more limited process took place: an individual undertook a review based on documentary study and interviews with key participants. The lead person in these cases was not a national of that country, but had contributed over a number of years to that programme's development.

Analysis across countries

Over the two-year period members of the editorial team analysed what was coming out of the studies. Where issues were raised which required insights beyond the scope of the selected studies, additional short papers were commissioned.

Clarity on central issues was greatly enhanced by discussions at four cross-regional workshops set up as part of the project, where 170 people from 35 countries debated the issues that this book is concerned with. Participants included Save the Children staff and partner organisations, local and international NGOs, government officials and academics.

We have tried to make each study intelligible to people who have never been to that country by including enough background on the context, and have avoided dense academic styles and unnecessary acronyms. *

The editorial team
London, August 1999

* Those we have used are:

NGO (non-governmental organisation) local NGOs -
operating within one country, though often funded from
international sources international NGOs -working in many
countries, with funding usually recruited in wealthier
countries and used to support programmes in poorer
countries

CRC (the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

SCF (Save the Children/UK)

DFID (the UK government's Department for International
Development)

UN agencies (e.g. UNICEF)

GNP (Gross National Product)

The themes were:

- Challenges in basic education - South and Central Asia (**Nepal, July 1998**)
- Challenges in basic education - Africa (**Kenya, July 1999**)
- Education in countries in rapid economic/political transition

(Kyrgyzstan, April 1999)

- The potential of NGOs for influencing education policy and practice
- (Brazil, July 1999)**

HOW THE MATERIAL IS ARRANGED

- We recommend that readers look first at Section I, which gives an overview of issues, and locates within a wider context the questions raised in particular studies.
- Country case studies have been grouped in four further sections around contexts that produce disadvantage, each with an introduction highlighting the linkages. Each of the sections can be read on its own, and they do not need to be read in sequence.

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SECTION I. EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN THE WORLD NEGLECTS

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We begin by clarifying the scope of these studies:

- The children, the types of schooling, the questions we ask about them
- The grouping of studies to reflect a range of contexts
- The concepts we use to analyse educational disadvantage

Contexts of disadvantage

Each study in this collection traces the evolution of Save the Children's work in education in a particular country, and in response to the needs of a particularly disadvantaged group of children. The aim is to learn what each of these cases can tell us about what constitute useful types of involvement for an international agency in education.

THE CHILDREN, THE SCHOOLS, THE ASPIRATIONS

The children

They live in shanty towns in Peru, remote villages in Mozambique, and the foothills of the Himalayas. Their families are poor and they are expected to work from an early age, stitching footballs in Pakistan or herding animals in the arid Sahel. Some speak languages which are the vehicle of strong oral cultures but which are looked down on by the dominant national group and never used in school. Others have been dismissed

by adults as not worth educating - girls - or even ineducable - children with disabilities. While many of the children are lively and resilient, some have experienced at an early age a level of stress that is painful to contemplate - Palestinian children born into crowded urban refugee camps to parents who were themselves born in the camp; Mongolian children who survive the freezing winters undernourished and underclad, paying the price of political change that has swept over their country; Liberian boys who were recruited at gun point to be fighters in a civil war and then dumped by the factions that recruited them, a potential menace to themselves and society.

The schools

Across this huge range of life experiences, of political and geographical contexts, people put their faith in the power of schools to offer these children a better chance in life; but it is precisely these groups of children who are least likely to get the kind of schooling that could help them. Some live in places where there are no schools. For others, the local schools are of such poor quality that it is developmentally healthier for children not to be in them. The school systems are run by inflexible bureaucracies - if children face difficulties in attending because of the constraints of their lives, that is their problem, not one for the school system to sort out. What is taught in school is often incomprehensible (in a language children have never heard) and unrelated to their lives. Teachers are harsh, unmotivated and unmotivating. Children with hard-pressed life conditions drop out, having learnt little. Vulnerable children get the worst of school systems, when they have most need of the best.

The systems

The diversity of life contexts suggests that a diversity of types of education would be needed; and certainly there are major differences in what is provided. But these differences stem more from levels of resourcing and patterns of political decision-making than from any consideration of the kind of education system that would be appropriate in that context. In many countries there is a depressing lack of concern by policy makers and those who administer school systems as to whether the service they deliver is relevant -to any child, let alone to children dealing with the burdens of poverty and disadvantage. The subject matter of these studies treads on what is inevitably controversial ground; this is compounded by the fact that we are considering a role for an international agency in what goes on in national education systems¹. So we need to begin by clarifying certain assumptions about the process being investigated that were common to the groups producing these studies.

What kind of education?

Save the Children's perspective on education is that it is a life-long process, beginning

at birth within the family, and that the education children receive out of school may be of more value than that which they get from school. But these studies focus specifically on schooling, responding to the almost universal desire in poor communities for children to be able to go to school, which in turn is based on the assumption that this will help them have a better chance in life. ²

The studies all consider problems of basic education provision for children. We use the term broadly, to mean the first stage of schooling, but this varies according to context:

- Pre-school provision, in a country where children do not start school till 8 [Mongolia]
- The first years of primary school [Mali, Pakistan] or the whole primary school stage [Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Peru]
- Out-of-school activities across the age range [Lebanon].
- 'Catch up' education for youths affected by war [Liberia]

The studies do not accept the common (though often unstated) view that in situations of disadvantage it is enough to think of getting children into school, and something of a luxury to ask the question of how effective or useful school education is to them. The belief that school should be useful to children is central to all these studies; and by this we mean that it should in some degree prepare them for the actual life conditions they will face. The greater the degree of disadvantage, the earlier the pressures of difficult life conditions impinge, and the sharper is the need to consider what children get out of school. Each study thus begins with a brief analysis of factors that determine the life circumstances of that particular group of children. Since these vary greatly across the different contexts, there can be no single model of an 'appropriate' educational response.

Why do children go to school? Why do their parents want them to? Across these diverse contexts there is a surprisingly wide area of agreement. A useful education is thought of in most of the contexts studied here to be one which helps children (at a minimum)

- become literate and numerate
- acquire basic skills to equip them for life challenges and improve their livelihood options
- become responsible members of society, trained in what that community considers good values

- extend their understanding of the world around them.

Each of the studies engages with the challenge of making this a reality even in the most resource-poor situations, and each highlights an aspect of relevance which particularly applies in that context.

Constraints and strategies

Local research groups were asked to consider two broad questions in relation to one group of particularly disadvantaged children:

- What *constraints* prevent this group of children from getting to school, or if they are in school, from getting a schooling that is useful to them?
- What *strategies* has Save the Children developed which it considers potentially effective in improving schooling for this group of children?

Constraints can be analysed at several levels. The studies refer to but do not attempt to analyse in any detail the more fundamental constraints on the capacity of national governments in poorer countries to deliver effective school systems: questions of financing, management, the effects of corruption, of conflict, of structural adjustment programmes, of international debt burdens, etc. All of these have been well-documented elsewhere.³ The focus here is rather to consider constraints that appear most evident in a particular context, and about which it seems possible that something can be done, given a modest input of outside financing and organisational collaboration.

By *strategies* we mean a way of tackling problems. Each study traces the history of one Save the Children education programme, and evaluates the strategies it has used. By 'education programme' we mean an inter-related set of activities in one country, undertaken to stimulate positive change in how education is provided for disadvantaged children.⁴ There are many possible strategies for tackling a similar problem, and the decision which to use has depended on an analysis of the particularities of that context. For instance in the case of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon the school system is rigid, inappropriate and difficult to influence, and the strategy described here was to develop a range of out-of-school activities which met the needs that school was not meeting. In Mozambique the system was similarly rigid and inappropriate but much less effective in its coverage. Here the strategy was to support the school system itself to become more effective (by repairing schools, funding teacher training, etc) and to use that as an entry point to lever for more flexibility and relevance.

How do we 'evaluate' strategies?

We use 'evaluate' in its general sense of making a judgement about the value of those strategies - how effective have they been in that context, and what is the potential for applying them elsewhere?

By the nature of the subject, as well as the chosen methodology of participant evaluation, the judgements are primarily qualitative. Quantitative indicators were collected wherever appropriate and possible, but the studies do not focus on broad measurements of 'outcome' such as increase in enrolment or decrease in the drop out rate. These have their place but are blunt tools for understanding the process by which change has taken place, which is the primary concern of the studies. They are also of dubious validity in making judgements about the impact of a defined set of activities, given all the extraneous factors that are known to affect enrolment and drop out (inability to pay school fees, the need to earn, environmental pressures, political instability, etc.)

In undertakings as complex as these, each made up of many different strands of activity by many people over many years, impact cannot be precisely measured; but judgements can and have to be made as to whether a particular way of tackling a problem is useful.

Primarily, then, what these studies explore is the rationale behind how work on education developed, as seen by those who have had a hand in developing it. What problems were the activities designed to tackle? Why were certain approaches used and others not? Why were particular partners chosen? What issues arose which had not been foreseen? How were strategies altered to take account of these? What problems have not been tackled, and why?

The research groups were not asked to assess whether it would be possible to repeat these experiences on a broader scale. It is an important question but to answer it meaningfully would require an analysis of many other factors outside the range of this study, including the agendas of major organisations, governments, and powerful interest groups.

To summarise:

The studies are primarily concerned with identifying processes that could move school systems in a direction more appropriate to the needs of disadvantaged children. They offer no simplistic solutions, but a serious engagement with the complexity of each context and the challenges it poses. Collectively they make clear that even given formidable constraints, sensitive support from an international agency *can* foster processes which will improve schooling for the most disadvantaged.

GROUPING OF CASE STUDIES

The studies are grouped in four sections to reflect the range of conditions that structure children's educational disadvantage:

- **Where there is no school [India, Mali]**
- **Children affected by conflict [Lebanon, Liberia, Mozambique]**
- **Pressures from a global economy [Pakistan, Mongolia]**
- **Linking schools and society [Ethiopia, Peru]**

Where there is no school

This section considers what can be done in places where children cannot go to school because there is no school accessible to them. The examples are from rural Africa and South Asia, the two continents with the poorest economic and education indicators, where probably half the children of primary school age are not in school. Both studies are set in remote rural areas, and each traces the history of a small-scale experiment to work with villagers to create their own schools. They highlight the critical role of project initiators in situations where communities are seriously disempowered, and show contrasting ways in which an international agency can support community initiatives:

- In the India case the initiating group is a local NGO; Save the Children's role has been to provide support over a long enough period to allow the development of responsive styles of school provision, based on a high degree of community involvement.
- In the Mali case there was no local group to initiate community action so Save the Children staff themselves took this role, linking it from the outset to negotiation with government education providers.

These are supplemented by summaries from two studies (not published here for reasons of space) which highlight the fact that certain groups of children may be excluded even in countries with generally high levels of primary school provision:

- In Zimbabwe state planners have ignored the needs of the children of workers on the large commercial farms. Here Save the Children worked as a broker between government and employers, to change a situation where neither took responsibility for providing schools for the children.

- In Lesotho. Save the Children was invited by the Ministry of Education to help implement a national plan to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools.

Children affected by conflict

This section considers situations where international agencies get involved in education provision as a response to humanitarian crises. For children damaged by war or political conflict schooling assumes a special importance, creating a 'normalised' environment and offering purpose to young lives in otherwise bleak situations. The studies illustrate attempts to provide appropriate education for conflict-affected children, contrasting the immediate and long-term contexts:

- The Lebanon case deals with long term effects of unresolved political conflict, in this case on Palestinian children whose only experience of life has been in refugee camps. Here schools are provided with UN assistance, but they follow a rigid local system and do little to tackle critical issues of identity and self esteem. The study describes attempts to meet these needs through complementary education activities outside school, highlighting the importance of child and community participation.
- The Liberia case, set against the background of civil war, shows how direct rapid intervention by an international agency may be the only way to help children damaged by war, in this case child soldiers at the point of demobilisation. With no centrally determined curriculum or school structure to constrain it, the project evolved highly responsive styles of schooling tailored to the boys' needs, and then found that these proved effective also for children in surrounding communities.
- The Mozambique study describes an attempt to support a provincial government in rebuilding education provision after conflict, in a situation of very limited resources. Here the priority initially was on infrastructure, but with a growing recognition of the need to engage also with what happens in schools.

Pressures from a global economy

This section highlights situations where children are directly affected by the impact of international economic pressures, and where education could have a role to play in mitigating the problems if styles of schooling could be adapted to the demands of a changing environment. The studies give two examples where Save the Children has

used its international experience to contribute to an analysis of problems and to support education providers in adapting to a new situation:

- In Pakistan an international consumer-led ban on child labour (which aimed somewhat simplistically to take children out of work and into school) threatened to leave children vulnerable and without alternatives. Through a survey of children's attitudes Save the Children helped to show that the work was not hazardous, and that low quality schooling rather than work had been the main cause of low school attendance. In partnership with other organisations it pressed for a phased approach to the ban. Save the Children now works with a local NGO to improve school conditions in the area most affected.
- In Mongolia a period of sudden economic decline and social upheaval followed the loss of a protected place within the Soviet economy, and the withdrawal of subsidies which had previously supported a well resourced education system. The state-run pre-school system was threatened at the time when more young children were becoming vulnerable. Save the Children supported the national government to monitor the effects of transition on children and to develop a framework for adapting pre-school provision to the changing context.

Linking schools and society

The final section considers attempts to link school systems more closely to the societies they are intended to serve, through encouraging them to be more responsive to the views of parents, teachers and children. The cases are from one of the poorest countries in Africa and one in Latin America, where multilateral and bilateral donors have an input into education reform at national level but there are doubts about the benefits these will bring at school level. The studies consider the role of a smaller agency in supporting improvements in schooling from the bottom up, by facilitating interaction between education providers and the people who use the schools:

- The study from Ethiopia illustrates an attempt to encourage government providers at the regional level to develop more responsive styles of school provision, allowing more involvement by school users. It highlights the possibilities but also the limits of governmental decentralisation.
- From Peru, where state education provision has declined as a result of economic and political instability, this study describes an attempt to build on the Latin American tradition of civic action, engaging key educational

actors (teachers, school users, academics) in more active participation in national debates on education reform.

[For further discussion of issues in each context, see introductions to Sections II-V.]

ANALYSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

- **The concept of 'educational marginalisation'**
- **The impact of poverty on schooling**
- **What is wrong with schools?**

The concept of 'educational marginalisation'

For the purposes of the research we used as a working tool the rather vague term 'disadvantaged', but we hoped through an analysis of the resulting case studies to reach a clearer understanding of what structures educational disadvantage.

A concept that we have considered is the idea of 'marginalisation', increasingly used to describe the commonality of many states of disadvantage.⁵ The term is useful in that it reflects what many people experience as a reality (both within states and globally) of a number of 'centres' where power is concentrated and decisions are made, while on the edges are groups who are excluded from decision making and cut off from the benefits of what society provides. 'Marginalised' implies, therefore, a contrast with 'mainstream'. The difficulty is that it is easy to slip from a distinction of mainstream/marginal to assuming that this is a majority/minority phenomenon i.e. that the 'marginalised' are a numerical minority. But we would need to include among the educationally marginalised all children who cannot go to school because they have to work to support families; all who live in rural areas where there is not a school in every village; those in poor communities who get to school but because of the very low quality of schooling do not stay long enough to get anything useful from it; children of pastoralists, most children with disabilities; the millions of children in city slums... Add to that girls, in the many societies where girls' education is not considered important, and it is clear that we are not considering a small numerical minority on the edges, for in some countries the children who are 'marginalised' educationally may well constitute a third or more of children of school age.

The term usefully adds to the more neutral 'disadvantaged' the sense of being excluded by from participation in decision making. But in this sense the term could apply to whole populations, and certainly to almost all children in respect of the education they are expected to undergo. But this in itself highlights an important feature of what we are considering here - the lack of involvement of children and their communities in decisions about schooling. With all the many reasons why the children in these studies

are disadvantaged educationally, two stand out as common across continents and different political or economic contexts:

- ***Poverty***: Poverty is the most obvious common issue, the most powerful excluder from school. Not all states of educational disadvantage are caused by poverty but all are made worse by it.
- ***Schools are unresponsive*** - to children's developmental needs, their life conditions, and changing environments. Few school systems have mechanisms that would enable a more responsive style of schooling to develop, through allowing children, their parents and teachers a role in influencing the kind of schooling children are expected to undergo. We shall consider each of these themes in turn below.

THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON SCHOOLING

- **How are poverty and educational disadvantage linked?**
- **Is poverty natural?**
- **Child poverty and schooling in rural areas**
- **The experience of poverty and the consequences of inequality**

How are poverty and educational disadvantage linked?

The studies show four different kinds of link between poverty and educational disadvantage:

- ***State poverty***: Children in the poorest countries are those who face the most obvious educational disadvantage. By 'poorest countries' we mean those with the overall worst economic indicators, where the state is least equipped to provide and resource effective schooling. In these studies Mali, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Pakistan are clear examples, with educational disadvantage being reflected in almost all aspects of school provision - not enough schools, buildings in a poor state, few books or learning materials, and teachers inadequately trained or untrained, underpaid, under-motivated.
- ***Economic class - inequity in state provision***: Both in these 'poorest' countries, and in others such as India and Peru which are not classed among the poorest in terms of GNP but have high levels of poverty, there is markedly uneven distribution of educational chances. For children in the poorest classes economically the state provides fewer schools, and schools of lower quality - poorer buildings, less equipment, and fewer trained or motivated teachers.

• ***Poverty created by political events or upheavals in society:*** Many of the studies describe an increase in poverty linked to specific events:

- In Mongolia the sudden changes of the past decade;
- For Palestinians in Lebanon, lost livelihoods with the loss of their land;
- In Liberia, the civil war that left large numbers of children without adult carers;
- In Mozambique, the effect of HIV/AIDS, which both threatens children directly and may leave them without adult care.

Children, as the most vulnerable group in society, are hardest hit by any kind of economic decline or social upheaval; and children of poor families will be disproportionately affected (leading among other things to dropping out of school) because their families are least able to manage the extra pressures.

• ***Household poverty and the costs of schooling:*** All but one of these studies highlights the fact that for the poor, the costs of a child attending school are far higher relative to household income than for the better off. The only exception is Liberia, which deals with young boys who no longer live as part of a household. As a result, within poor communities, the children from the poorest households are the least likely to be at school. The studies raise issues of costs to the family of three kinds: loss of the contribution the child can make to household income is an issue in almost all the studies; contributions in labour and materials to constructing and repairing school buildings; and -perhaps the most critical issue here - contribution to teachers' salary. ⁶

In most contexts there is the added burden (not specifically treated in these studies) of school uniforms, books, and a number of other levies.

Is poverty natural?

Over the past decade the stated aims of major development assistance programmes have come to include phrases like 'alleviating poverty', 'reducing poverty', even 'ending poverty'. This recognition of the importance of the issue is welcome, but it is not often accompanied by serious analysis of what causes poverty, and without this it is difficult to see how progress can be made in alleviating it or in achieving meaningful reforms in social service provision. In education reform as in other sectors, interventions geared towards quick results fail to improve things longer term because of the lack of analysis of linkages with poverty.

The experience from these case studies reinforces what can be learnt from serious study in many fields: that poverty is not a 'natural' state but is continually being constructed, by environmental, economic and political forces. To list some of the examples generated by these studies, each of which is representative of types of poverty causation in many other countries:

- Until the political and economic changes of ten years ago there were no Mongolian children having to fend for themselves on the streets; as in many of the countries of the former Soviet Union.
- If the wealthier countries did not profit from unequal terms of trade, and workers could earn living wages for their labour, there would not be so many children forced into work to help support the family. Piecemeal attempts to redress rights within a basically exploitative situation do not relieve poverty; children banned from the football stitching industry in Pakistan will still have to work to help support their families, but they may be forced into work which is more hazardous.
- The children in the Sahel studies (both in Ethiopia and in Mali) live in communities that have to struggle considerably harder for survival than they did fifty years ago, because of changes in the land and climate, and those changes themselves are affected by patterns of land use, conflict, etc.
- Palestinians would not be facing the kind of poverty they do in refugee camps if the major powers had not colluded with the events that caused them to lose their country; and their poverty could now be reduced if the Lebanese authorities allowed them to work outside the camp.
- If the international arms industry did not profit from the sale of weapons, there would be little to fuel conflicts such as those in Liberia.

Child poverty and schooling in rural areas

Five of the studies give a particular insight into problems of schooling in rural areas of poor countries. Here poverty affects children in extreme forms: they do not have enough to eat, are vulnerable to disease, and in many cases malnutrition in early childhood has affected physical and intellectual development. Even where children are able to go to school, their ability to concentrate is likely to be diminished by these burdens.

Each study moves beyond general statements about poor levels of state resourcing to

give an insight into the conditions which, in that particular geographical or political context, compound the difficulties for the authorities (in providing schools) or for the children (in benefiting from them where they exist.) In both the Somali Region of Ethiopia and Douentza District in Mali the land is arid, drought is a constant threat, and survival is a finely balanced matter. Children have to work to contribute to the family economy. The studies highlight the inappropriateness of school systems which do not take this into account. Parents are forced to make hard choices about whether to invest in basic household survival needs or whether to send children to school (and if so, which children). Both the Somalis in Ethiopia and the Fulfulde in Mali are pastoralists, and sections of the community have to move for part of the year to find grazing for animals, thus posing particular challenges in school provision (issues which the studies here acknowledge, but do not directly tackle).⁷ In Zambezia Province in Mozambique a major complicating factor was the destruction caused by a protracted civil war, and the legacy of tension it left. In the 'hills' in north India (mountains by most standards) geography is a determining factor: children would have to make an arduous journey to get to a school in a neighbouring village, yet low population density means the state cannot envisage providing a school in each village. But here too political factors play a part; the villagers in this study are what in India are called a 'tribal' group (elsewhere they might be called an ethnic/cultural minority) and there is a perception that government is less concerned to provide schools for their children.

Though rural areas are generally least well served in terms of schooling, the essential divider is economic class, not geography. Children in shanty towns have equally slim chances of getting a useful schooling, and rural children from better off families are not disadvantaged in the way the poor are. This point is so obvious to anyone working in these contexts that most of the case studies do not state it explicitly; but to a wider audience it perhaps needs underlining because it has become unfashionable in the west to analyse in terms of economic class. The Pakistan study effectively highlights the distinction. It is set in the relatively prosperous district of Sialkot, one of the success areas of rural development with fertile agricultural land and diversified small scale industry. But the children in the study are from the poorest class, providing cheap labour in the industries as a supplement to peasant farming that alone cannot support the family. Despite the relative wealth of the district, schools for poor villagers barely functioned at the start of the programme. The Zimbabwe case (given in a summarised extract) provides an even more glaring example, where there were no schools for the children of poor farm labourers.

In situations where poverty has been the norm for generations, conditions that to outsiders may seem unbearable are borne with pragmatic acceptance. For instance, assumptions in wealthier societies about the damaging effect on children of having to work to contribute to family income are challenged by the expressed opinions of children themselves in both the Pakistan and Mali cases. This makes international interventions in situations of poverty particularly complex to manage honestly.

Importing outside standards that would be impossible to achieve in that context would be unhelpful; the other extreme is worse, that of assuming that poor schools are good enough for poor children.

The experience of poverty and the consequences of inequality

A second factor which makes it difficult to make useful judgements across contexts is that while one can compare absolute levels of poverty (state poverty as expressed in GNP, household income, levels of resourcing for education) the experience of poverty is relative. People feel poor compared to what others around them have, and also compared to what they used to have. A city kindergarten in Mongolia or a school for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon does not appear 'poor' to an international visitor in the same way that a school of crumbling mud in Mali does. But this does not mean that the problems in the Mongolia or Lebanon cases are experienced as any less urgent for those concerned; in both of these cases the sharp sense of loss of what one used to have makes the deprivation feel all the greater.

The Mongolia study offers a particularly useful context for considering the relationship of poverty and school opportunity. The school system was until the recent economic decline well resourced, with well trained teachers, and achieving almost 98% coverage by schools and 25% by state run kindergartens (a level seldom met in the west). With the dramatic economic decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the state could no longer resource this level of provision. Under pressure from donors it cut spending on the kindergarten system and imposed user fees, just at a time when child poverty and vulnerability was increasing dramatically. User fees meant that the children who most needed the care of a good kindergarten were least able to get it; and in a society where the social problems and rising crime that come with poverty were new, it was particularly clear that society as a whole stood to lose from the exclusion of the poorest children from adequate care.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH SCHOOLS?

- **The failure of school systems to achieve their aims**
- **Systems with no mechanisms for change**
- **The vital link between school and society**

While one cannot overstate the importance of poverty issues in limiting educational opportunity, it is equally important to recognise that there are other factors that seriously limit the usefulness of school-going for the world's most disadvantaged children. What can we learn from these case studies about the nature of the school systems themselves?

We are thinking here particularly of the school experience for children in the poorest communities, but against the background of the 'normal' form of schooling in that society. The 'norm' is important even for children excluded from school (as in the studies in Section II) or those for whom alternatives are set up (as in Section III). It is the normal system into which they aim to be accepted, or against which the adults leading experimental projects react.

The failure of school systems to achieve their aims

In the state schools in the context reflected in these studies, the typical classroom experience has at least one and in several cases all of the following serious limitations:

- The teachers are not responsive to children's needs, and their harshness depresses the children's capacity to learn and develop
- Children are not encouraged to learn in the way they are best able to (actively) or to acquire learning skills they could use outside the classroom
- The schools do not provide effective teaching in literacy and other basic skills
- The experience of school does not prepare children for real-life challenges.

Where *all* these limitations apply it is almost certainly more damaging for children to be in school than out of it. Children whose days are spent herding animals rather than sitting in a classroom at least develop skills of problem solving and independence while the supposedly luckier ones in school are stunted in their mental, physical and emotional development by being rendered passive, and having to spend hours each day in a crowded room under the control of an adult who punishes them for any normal level of activity such as moving or speaking. At the end of several years the children who have been at school have not learnt enough of what school is supposed to offer to equip them to earn outside the community they were born into, but they have missed learning how to survive within it; while for children out of school the skills needed for survival have been learnt effectively (because they have been learnt actively, by modelling and by being given real responsibilities.) In such situations not going to school is almost certainly better for children and a better preparation for adult life.

When we compare how the systems in each of the countries in the studies rate on the four criteria listed above, we discover a revealing pattern of how this interacts with problems caused by poverty, and it is not the simple equation one might expect. In the

countries where inadequate resourcing has been the pattern for decades, schools do badly on all four counts, but the converse is not always true. The Mongolia system, the one most recently hit by a severe decline in resources, comes out high on effectiveness - but the issue of preparation for actual life challenges is a major concern, here as elsewhere. Effectiveness here is achieved because the system is still running on fuel supplied by a better resourced era, and this includes teachers trained to deliver the prescribed curriculum in the prescribed form. The system itself lacks a mechanism for internally generated change based on sensitivity to changing external realities.

A similar relationship between problems caused by poverty and those intrinsic to the system itself is observable *within* countries with very inequitable income distribution, like Pakistan or India, and here the Peru study is particularly interesting because it is dealing with quality issues across the national school system. In such countries the state system applies to children across economic classes but schools for the better off are considerably better resourced; children in better off schools *do* on the whole become literate, learn a prescribed body of facts and pass national exams, which gives them a definite advantage over those in poor schools where effectiveness in these terms is much lower. But for better off children as well there are severe limitations because teaching style precludes a genuine educational process, and there is an equal issue about the relevance of what is taught.

Systems with no mechanism for change

The studies reflect a great diversity of systems but all are trapped by their own particular history, creaking uncomfortably under the pressure of changing times, and fundamentally resistant to change. Almost all the systems were essentially modelled on those of the colonial powers (Britain, France, Portugal, Spain) and still use styles of classroom discipline and teaching methodology that were current a hundred years ago or more in the colonial country but have long since been repudiated there. They remain entrenched in the ex-colonies, and education ministry officials continue to be resistant to the suggestion of changes that appear to offer anything less rigidly defined than their conception of the education systems of the wealthier west. Within the systems themselves there are no inherent mechanisms for change:

- Few teachers in under-resourced systems have opportunities for in-service training. Their initial training may have had almost no methodological content, and rarely of a kind that would help them respond creatively to difficult teaching contexts.
- There are few structures that make officials accountable for what they do, and almost none which would suggest to them that listening to what children and communities want from schools is a relevant part of their

role.

- There is little public debate on education. Decisions are typically made at national ministry of education level and passed down through the hierarchy.
- Where pressure for change comes from international donor sources, this commonly has the effect of making the system less responsive rather than more. Dependence on donor funding engenders a passive attitude on the part of officials, who wait to see what donor priorities are and adjust their policies accordingly.

The Ethiopian and Mongolian case studies are the most unusual in this respect, as both describe systems at critical points in their history, attempting radical changes. In both countries the base from which they start is an inherited model which no longer offers a relevant education for a dramatically changed social and political context. In Ethiopia, the change is decentralising school provision in ethnic/language-defined regions; in Mongolia, the challenge is to adapt a system set up in the communist era to a new set of assumptions about how society is organised. But in both the vehicle for a new approach was in fact something external to the system itself, that is, the partnership with an international NGO.

The schools for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon offer a particularly telling example of the need for change, and resistance to it. Fifty years ago the situation of Palestinians in these camps was expected to be temporary, so the temporary expedient was adopted of setting up schools according to the system of the country they had fled to, Lebanon. The Palestinians are stuck there still, with a school system that is, and always was, out of tune with what the children need.

In the Africa and South Asia cases independence from colonial rule has not brought about change in the essential nature of the system, but rather an attempt to extend the coverage of that system, which under colonial rule was never intended to reach more than a small minority. Expansion of numbers has been the primary aim, but without the economic base to sustain levels of effectiveness. And while in the 'Education for All' decade of the 1990s major international agencies and donors have pressed for reforms such as more active learning methods, the major thrust again has been to achieve maximum enrolments within existing school systems.⁸

The systems themselves always were inappropriate, both to the developmental and learning needs of children and as a mechanism to contribute to society's development. Now, with their archaic methods for 'learning' and 'teaching', their rigid curricula, their rigid and heavily bureaucratised structures, and above all their concept of school as an

institution essentially separate from the community, these systems are dysfunctional - unable to fulfill their function of preparing children for life in the present era.

These limitations in the system have of course been observed by educationalists and others over many decades. Why then have the problems not been solved? Consider the process by which such systems attempt to reform themselves: when the need for change becomes glaring, or when outside agencies which are subsidising government budgets apply a degree of pressure which can no longer be avoided, a complex bureaucratic process is set in motion from the centre. Committees are formed, experts summoned. Research is quoted and the experts agree that what is needed is a more relevant curriculum and active learning methods. New procedures are defined, the curriculum altered, examination systems revised, new financial management systems put in; and finally (assuming resources to fuel the process have not run out) those who are supposed to administer the new system are retrained. Some resist the new processes, others go along with them, but through it all the basic system lumbers on, and a decade later it needs reforming again.

The vital link between school and society

The fundamental issue is the relationship between schools and society. In essence the education of children is a process by which adults in the society train them and equip them for adult life. But the systems have become so remote from the adults who actually know the children, who are responsible for them in the broadest sense, who know the conditions of their lives and what they are likely to have to deal with, that this basic connection has been lost. Looking back over the century (which is as long as schools in the form we are discussing them have been a feature in the lives of most of these communities, and for some it is a much shorter period) there are understandable historical reasons why this happened, but by divorcing schooling of the young from their communities, it has become professionalised and bureaucratised beyond the point of usefulness.

For the many millions of children who are not in school the task of educating the next generation is already back in the hands of adults in the community, and in some respects they may be doing a better job than schools. But the increasing burdens of poverty make it more difficult every year for parents to respond adequately to their children's needs for care and development. Their own severe disempowerment limits their ability to provide some critical skills and kinds of knowledge which their children will need even to survive the type of life they were born into, let alone to move beyond it.

CONCLUSION

Children in disadvantaged sections of society do need the things school could offer. But the potential of schooling to contribute usefully to children's development and the development of society is not being realised because the systems themselves are unresponsive - to children's needs, to changing contexts, and to what the community can contribute to the educational process.

Any attempt to improve schooling for disadvantaged children must necessarily engage with issues of poverty, both in challenging its wider causes and looking for ways to alleviate its negative effects on children's educational chances. But this alone will not change their educational marginalisation. Nothing will be gained by trying to get more children into schools unless those schools can be improved to the point of usefulness; and one essential mechanism for doing this is to involve children, parents, teachers, communities, and government officials in processes which will shift schooling in a more responsive direction. The significance of the case studies is that each represents an attempt to do this.

What can an international agency do?

What do these studies contribute to our understanding of how to bring better education opportunities to the most marginalised groups of children? The approaches described here are as diverse as the political contexts and cultures they were responding to. But looking across them we can extract certain shared conclusions, both about the general question of how to achieve change in education, and on what role an international NGO might play.

We begin by clarifying some assumptions about international agency activity in education. Then we consider the role of international support in

- **Attempting to realise children's right to education**
- **Acting as a catalyst for positive change.**

VALUES, RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCY ACTIVITY

In analysing the approaches used by programme initiators and managers in the education programmes studied here, our aim is to become clearer about what is an appropriate role for an international NGO working in education. To talk of an 'appropriate' role is to make a value judgement, and since it is the convention of most western academic research that one should avoid doing this, we need to begin by stating our position.

Values and education

The subject matter of these studies is itself a series of judgements (about what to do and why) and all of them are based on values. It is for instance a value (which one either believes in or doesn't) that it matters as much that girls should learn to read as boys. It is values that tell us it is unacceptable for a particular group of children to receive an education inferior to others simply because they are from a different ethnic group, or a more impoverished class economically. Education is an area loaded with values and these differ widely across societies. It is impossible to consider a value-free intervention by an international agency in education.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Save the Children, like many other agencies, takes as its mandate for being involved in issues of children's education the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹ The CRC, ten years old in the year these studies are published, represents an attempt by international bodies to define a set of values relating to children that will be valid across countries, and can serve as a basis for negotiation between governments and recognised international bodies because it has been ratified by almost all the governments of the world. While it cannot be assumed that a signature on such a document means either agreement with its details or an intention to implement them, it does provide a basis for discussion, and there is considerable value in having the terms of co-operation made explicit.

What the CRC has to say about children's schooling is summarised in the box at the end of this chapter. It makes several significant points relevant to the theme of this book. Of the two articles specifically on education, Article 28 stresses the right of *all* children to education, without discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic group, disability, religion, etc. Article 29 states that the *purpose* of a school education is to prepare children for responsible roles in society: that is, to inculcate in them not just skills but values that will enable them to contribute positively. It recognises the primary care role of families and communities but puts the responsibility on state systems to support communities in carrying out that role in cases where children might otherwise be vulnerable. As an extension of the same principle, it recognises that national governments face severe resource constraints in trying to make a reality of children's right to education, and explicitly opens the way for international co-operation to realise this right. The underlying philosophy therefore is one in which the whole human community shares the responsibility to see that children are given the supportive structures they need to survive, develop their potential, and in their turn contribute positively to society. Where those closest to the children can carry that responsibility, they are the most appropriate ones to do it; where they cannot, the wider society has a responsibility to intervene to support processes which will ensure that children's survival and developmental needs are met.

Beyond this, while those who drafted the CRC did not challenge any of the current assumptions about school systems, it is clear that they were aware of some of their limitations. There is a statement that school discipline should not be harsh and that the dealings of adults towards children should be based on respect for the individual child; another article stresses children's right to knowledge in areas that affect their lives. And there are two articles which, if seriously applied to schools, would radically change the way most systems operate. One is the *'best interests'* principle: that in any matter affecting children, where there are apparent contradictions of principle, the matter will be decided according to the best interests of the child. The second is the *'children's participation'* principle: that in any matter concerning them children are entitled to express their views and to have them seriously listened to (with due consideration for their age.)

'Responsive schools'

The concept of *'responsive schools'* as it is used in this book has emerged through practical experience of trying to support changes that will incorporate these values about children's education in the way schools are set up and run. Being responsive is the mechanism by which the institution takes account of the needs it is supposed to be designed to meet:

- Children's needs, as articulated by the communities of which they are part
- Children's own expressed views
- The perceptions of adults both within and outside the communities of the kinds of life challenges children are likely to face.

To say that schools should respond to children's needs is a simple sounding statement which hides a complex reality, for the needs may be differently defined by all these different participants; but without some process of trying to understand those needs and respond to them, the schools will be dysfunctional.

We would consider that responsive schools are *inclusive*, responding to the needs of all groups of children. Responsive education officials are accountable, accepting that they are entrusted with this role on behalf of the community. Responsive school systems are *appropriately resourced* (as a proportion of national revenue), responding to the universal citizen desire for children to have a chance of schooling. They provide a *quality education* for all (which is not necessarily an expensive one), through equipping the adults who teach children to help them get something useful and developmentally appropriate from the school experience.

Principles of international agency support for education

How should international agencies work to help bring about a situation where responsive schools are the norm? The world of international development assistance lacks an equivalent set of statements of agreed principle. There are current orthodoxies to which most organisations more or less subscribe but also unstated agendas which work against these, so that there is often a startling divergence between expressed values and practice. From the World Bank to the smallest local NGO there is hardly an organisation that would not claim to be in favour of participatory approaches, yet what they mean by it can scarcely be the same thing. To sharpen our understanding of strategies, and to judge which ones have which effects, we need to side-step statements of policy and observe what an organisation actually does. Learning from actual cases is one way to do that.

ATTEMPTING TO REALISE CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

We summarise here reflections from the studies on some central issues of education reform:

- **Can the state provide effective schools for children in the poorest communities?**
- **How can questions of exclusion be tackled?**
- **Are more responsive styles of state school provision feasible?**
- **Can provision be improved where the system itself is the problem?**

What changes in education provision are needed to fulfil the right to education for the most disadvantaged children? The studies show that the people who have managed the education programmes described here have gradually sharpened their understanding of how to work for children's rights in education. They came to realise that this is not merely a question of getting more children into school, but that in most cases it involves a challenge to what typically goes on in schools, and even to basic premises on which the education system was set up.

Can the state provide effective schools for children in the poorest communities?

In almost all the case studies the need for the programme arose because of the state's limited capacity to provide an effective education to the poorest or more disadvantaged children. The studies highlight some of the difficulties of trying to engage with these problems:

- *What can modest external inputs hope to achieve?*

Underlying each study are large questions about 'capacity building', and what changes it is realistic to aim for given the wider constraints. For instance, is it realistic to think that modest inputs of external support can enable under-resourced systems to adapt to changing external contexts? [Mongolia]; to improve children's livelihood prospects? [Pakistan]; to harness political decentralisation to get greater responsiveness in schooling? [Ethiopia]

- ***Change on all fronts simultaneously?***

Where everything about the quality of schooling is poor, simultaneous actions on all fronts may be needed, and in one given programme that may not be practically possible. Within each programme a degree of focus "was essential: on the language of instruction in Mali, basic training on lesson planning in Ethiopia, a locally generated curriculum in India, warmth and a strong social framework from adults in Liberia, lively learning activities in Lebanon. If we take all the studies together they cover the range of changes that would be needed, but this needs to be seen against a recognition that children need them all and in each case were offered only a selection.

- ***'New' approaches, or 'new in that context'?***

The programmes have much to offer to debates on relevance, because in contrast to many larger donor-supported education reform packages, they have grappled with issues that concern the whole condition of children's lives. Only a minority of the programmes attempted to pioneer new teaching and learning methods. Even then it would be best to describe these as 'new in that context'. Primarily the programmes have tried to find ways to apply existing knowledge about effecting approaches in the most disadvantaged contexts, where they may seem revolutionary. In an age when people in the wealthy countries, or well-off sections of poor countries, talk of the innovations in education that the electronic revolution will bring, millions of children are still struggling to learn to read through methods known to educationalists to be archaic and inefficient.

- ***Does local ownership of the process lead to recycling of inexperience?***

Where the programmes work with state systems, there has been a strategic choice to support the state system to manage its own reform process. In the least favourable circumstances this meant that state teacher trainers who themselves lacked exposure to a range of methods were recycling their own inexperience. The Mali programme was unusually fortunate in this respect, because they could draw on an alternative curriculum and accompanying methodology that existed within the state system but was hardly implemented. Where this is not possible, there are serious questions about the

usefulness of supporting teacher training if the programme does not feel able to negotiate an input of internationally tested techniques for helping children learn. The Lesotho case shows that it is possible to use an external specialist in a way which does not compromise the state system's management of the process.

- ***What happened to the last donor-supported reforms?***

The programmes here echo many attempts to improve effectiveness of schools over past decades, by professionals in state systems, by major donor agencies and by others down to the smallest NGO. There have been countless attempts to introduce active learning methods, more relevant curricula, and better trained teachers. Some of these efforts have succeeded, in some places, for some time; but people who have worked in this area for a number of decades are continually faced with a sense of 'Haven't we been here before?' In a visit to the programme area in Ethiopia, one of the editors was shown a teachers' resource centre that twenty years earlier had been equipped by a German government funded aid programme. There were piles of teaching aid charts produced on fabric so that they would last, deep in dust and carefully guarded by the couple of teaching aid technicians still left; the relics of a once enthusiastic (and probably temporarily successful) attempt to introduce more lively teaching methods. Nearby was a brand new building. World Bank funded, made with expensive imported materials, and empty, though it had been completed for some time. A modern donor attempt to revive the resource centre, but simply as a building, unlinked to any changes in the system to get human beings to use it to benefit children. The 'systems' we are taking on are not only cumbersome and unresponsive school systems, but also inappropriate styles of donor aid.

Are more responsive styles of state school provision feasible?

The studies all suggest that to achieve effective change there needs to be a real engagement by the people closest to schools. ² But are more participatory styles of schooling feasible? Each of the studies can be seen as offering light on a different aspect of this question:

- Can traditionally rigid state systems be persuaded to accept and value more involvement by communities and more child-focused approaches? [Mali, Ethiopia, Mozambique]. And as contributory questions to this:
- Can largely illiterate communities articulate their own concepts of what children should learn? Initiate their own schools? Provide trainable teachers? [India, Mali]
- Can a broad range of school users be equipped to influence state policy

and practice in education? [Peru]

- Can a more participatory style of schooling make a serious difference to children damaged by war and conflict? [Lebanon, Liberia]

How can questions of exclusion be tackled?

International agencies that base their work on a child rights mandate have made familiar a long list of groups of children who are often excluded from school: girls, children with disabilities, refugee children, working children, children of pastoralists, etc. It may seem strange to the reader that only a minority of the programmes described here appear to target these commonly listed groups. What, then, are the strategies the studies suggest for tackling exclusion, and trying to ensure that all children get access to an effective schooling?

• *A whole community approach*

The primary strategy is a whole-community one. This applies even where the initial focus is on one group. For example, though the Pakistan programme focussed initially on working children, the means of improving their school opportunities was to improve schools for *all* children in that district. In the Liberia programme separate schools were set up to meet the needs of ex-child soldiers. However since one of their central needs was to be reintegrated into society, children in the surrounding community were included in the schools, so they became in effect 'whole community' schools with a cross section of children benefiting from the innovations in methodology. The Lebanon programme focuses specifically on refugee children, but because of the circumstances of Palestinian refugee life this is in fact an entire community.

In all the other studies, there has been a definite strategic choice to tackle issues of school improvement in that community as a whole, and work on issues of exclusion has happened within that framework. This approach, scarcely articulated but clearly shared by people across diverse contexts, derives from the poverty focus discussed earlier - the recognition that poverty is the greatest excluder, and that in poor communities all children are disadvantaged, a fact which tends to get obscured by the long list of separate categories. It also reflects an understanding that problems are never uni-dimensional. We will consider this in relation to the numerically largest commonly excluded group, girls.

• *Getting girls into school*

A girl child is never just a girl but a child from a particular class, caste, ethnic group, etc. That she suffers educational disadvantage comes from a complex mixture of all

these factors; trying to tackle one facet in isolation is as pointless as looking at a broken down car and thinking you can get it moving again by changing the tyres. One of the primary reasons that girls drop out of school early is that they - in common with boys - get so little use out of school. That boys are kept there longer certainly reflects parents' view that boys' education matters more than that of girls, but nothing will be gained by an 'awareness raising' approach that persuades parents to send girls to useless schools. Yet take a more holistic approach and meaningful change is possible. In the village schools set up in the Mali and India programmes there is a high level of participation by girls (contrary to traditional cultural patterns in both areas) - achieved through engaging with the whole issue of schooling for disempowered villagers. Once villagers had begun to feel their own capacity to set up schools and to think through what should happen in them, they worked without apparent resistance towards trying to achieve parity for girls.

It is useful here to compare the Mozambique programme, where there was a similar concern to increase girls' access through general school improvement, but the programme was not set up to work towards it through an equal level of community engagement. Here the primary strategy was to support the provincial authorities to improve schools, and in the tensions after the civil war government was initially wary of international NGOs making too direct a relationship with communities. So while there have been activities with communities, they have not been of the kind that could achieve the empowering effect described in the Mali and India studies. On the question of girls, the main activity was to include a module on gender in the teacher training course. But while it is helpful for teachers to be made 'gender sensitive', this will not by itself change patterns by which parents decide whether to send girls to school. The issue here is targeting: one can expect change to be achieved only if the activity is directed to the point at which change can be produced.

• *Children with disabilities*

The issue of how to include children with disabilities in schools is a particularly interesting one in this respect, and one on which Save the Children has a large body of documented experience. There are potential points of change here on both sides - parental attitudes and the style of school provision. The programme in Lesotho [see Section II] aimed to include children with disabilities in mainstream schools, and first this required changes in the way the whole school system worked. A change in attitude was needed, an acceptance that school was for all children and that the onus was on the school to find ways to deal with diversity. Teachers also needed new skills, to cope with children with disabilities in classes which were already extremely overcrowded. But the mechanism here was to move away from teacher-directed rote learning methods to learning activities through which children could achieve at different rates, and to a style of classroom management that encouraged children to help each other. In other words, what was required was a transformation of classrooms into more positive

learning environments for *all* children.

- *Language, an issue of access and quality*

One significant omission from several of the programmes is a consideration of the issue of the language used in schools. Only rarely do all children in a particular system have the school language as their mother tongue (the only cases this applies to in these studies are Mongolia and Lebanon). In all other countries a large number of children, and in many countries the majority, have their first experience of trying to learn to read and write in a language they have probably never heard spoken and do not understand.³ They are taught by teachers whose own command of that language may be imperfect and who have no training in methods of teaching a second language. That any children manage to become literate under such circumstances is a testament to the immense resilience of children.

In the programme areas in India, Pakistan, Liberia and Mozambique, the children do not have Hindi, Urdu, English or Portuguese as mother tongues, though these are the languages they have to study in; and in Peru there is a significant minority with mother tongues other than Spanish. There are three possibilities here: either the language of the school is not a problem for children because their own language is sufficiently closely related (which may be the case in the India and Pakistan studies). Or it *is* a problem for the children but not perceived as such by the adults. Where there is a historical tradition of a school language different from the language of the home, only a minority of adults appear to recognise the degree to which this actively prevents children from getting anything useful from school. Or thirdly, adults may recognise it is a problem yet assume that it is too complicated to solve in countries with many languages, and most of them with no books. The Mali and Ethiopia case studies are particularly significant in that they show how it *has* been possible to support a move to mother tongue (or near mother tongue) literacy in the first years, even in severely under- resourced contexts, and of the clear impact this has had on what children get out of the school experience.

Can provision be improved where the system itself is the problem?

Many problems in schools are system-induced and not necessarily resource-linked. Here is a potential for tackling problems whose solutions will not depend on constant injections of large donor funding, and this is essentially the territory these studies explore. But here too anyone working for change is up against apparently insoluble dilemmas.

Essentially three approaches are reflected in these studies: to create alternative models, to work with the state system at its weakest points to demonstrate that even there improvements can be achieved, and to support civil society to make the state system

more accountable and more appropriate. All three depend for their success on a degree of responsiveness in existing systems, and this acts as a limitation on impact in each case:

- *Models from outside the system?*

If the state system cannot be persuaded to pay attention to innovations, they will affect the lives of only small numbers. Of course that in itself is worth doing. The issue is here that what is required to achieve a wider effect is probably not something that is within the power of the programme initiators. Similarly with a civil society movement: important reforms in education *have* been achieved through people's pressure, but usually in systems which are to some degree accountable. We have here a circular problem: having identified the critical importance of moving towards more responsive school systems, attempts to do so are handicapped because the systems are not responsive. Nor are the multilateral donors that have a major hand in determining the direction of state education policy.

- *Working from inside the system?*

The programmes that work with the state system can each demonstrate modest but definite gains in the direction of a more responsive and appropriate kind of schooling. But this partnership with the state also limits the ability of those who work in the programme to publicly state what they know to be the problems. In several of the studies one needs an ability to read between the lines to see the extent of the problems, and it would have been more useful and challenging if the contributors had given specific examples. But the reason for this vagueness is clear - the state is the main programme partner, and future progress would be compromised by going into print with criticisms.

This sense of constraint is typical of published reports from donors and international agencies, and one of the reasons why despite the volume of paper produced on these themes, public debate hardly seems to move forward: it seems impossible for the people who work most closely with these issues to publicly state what they know to be the case. And whereas for international agencies it is the need for discretion which dominates, for nationals the pressures are often more personal. To openly criticise may lose people their jobs and even risk their security.

- *The need for a civil society movement*

To challenge abuses and corruption within state system there would need to be a broad movement within that society. An international agency is an unlikely and inappropriate vehicle to initiate that, but it can support whatever groups in society are working for

more accountable education systems.

The difficulties however should not be underestimated. We give here one example, not directly from one of the studies but related to it. In the Pakistan programme Save the Children supports the work of a local NGO to improve the standards in rural primary schools, extremely low before the start of this project, as they are for most of the poor in Pakistan. One major problem that will probably not be solvable within the scope of programme activities is that the teachers do not live in the villages where they are allocated to teach, and very often do not turn up. This is a widespread and publicly admitted problem in rural schools in Pakistan; what is not often admitted publicly is that a major cause is corruption in teacher appointments. Appointments are frequently in the gift of politically powerful patrons; the relatives or political supporters appointed to rural schools are often not qualified teachers, and it is understood that they are not expected to take their duties seriously and that they will be protected in the unlikely event of questions being raised about their non-attendance. In a workshop held by Save the Children to bring together Pakistani NGOs, government officials and academics, there was almost unanimous agreement that corruption in appointments and consequent absenteeism by teachers constituted the single biggest obstacle to basic education provision for the poor in Pakistan. Yet in a country with a high level of political violence it takes courage for anyone to openly challenge cases where they see this happening.

ACTING AS A CATALYST FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

Despite these huge constraints, each of the studies offer insights into the process whereby sensitive international support can be a catalyst for positive change in the kind of schooling provided for disadvantaged children.

We summarise these as a series of principles about what to prioritise and how:

- **Schools as children experience them**
- **The vital link between schools and society**
- **Change from within, and the role of outside support**
- **Implications for donors**

Schools as children experience them

Any attempt to improve education for children should be based on an understanding of their life condition viewed broadly, retaining a strong concept of education as a preparation for life. Adults working in this area have to consciously attempt to get a sense of what the school experience feels like to children (who are put through it by adults)

- ***Maintain a holistic understanding of children's experience***

An organisation is best placed to work on education in areas where it has a broad understanding of the life conditions of children, which can be acquired through work on other sectors [Mali, Ethiopia]. It is not impossible to work appropriately coming in 'cold', but requires a concerted effort to gain the relevant breadth of experience fast [Mongolia]. Taking into account the whole condition of children's lives will almost certainly involve the NGO in sensitive issues, which will require not only tact but also a clear commitment to children's rights. In seriously disempowered communities, it is impossible to work appropriately on education without taking a position on the political conditions that determine children's lives [Lebanon, India]. Where certain groups of children are excluded, it may be necessary to challenge the attitudes of adults who manage the systems which exclude [Zimbabwe, Lesotho]. In conflict areas and humanitarian emergencies there is a particular role for an international NGO. ⁴ Because it is non-partisan it may be able to mediate to get things done for children where local groups would not be listened to, and its international staff can if the occasion requires afford to be more outspoken than local people could.

- ***Analyse problems from the children's point of view***

This general understanding of children's life conditions should be supplemented by specific research to define how children see questions of schooling in relation to other aspects of life [Pakistan], to understand the problems of schooling they experience [Peru], and to observe what aspects of conventional school methodologies are an obstacle to them [Liberia]. This switch of perspective from what adults intend to what children experience needs to be encouraged among all adults who can affect the style of schooling children are expected to undergo. So, for instance, teacher training, becomes not simply a matter of learning 'techniques' but of understanding their purpose and effect on children. [The Ethiopia case shows that this can be achieved even with modest resources and without the involvement of highly trained experts. The children said that after a short training course their teacher now checked at the beginning of each lesson that children had understood what had been taught yesterday, and if not, went back over it, which he had never done previously. In other words the teacher had switched perspective to seeing that the purpose was for children to learn something rather than for him to proceed through the text book.]

- ***Tackle problems locally, where children experience them***

To improve educational opportunities for children requires an engagement where children live and experience schooling [India], supporting communities to take a role in their children's schooling [Mali], and working with education authorities at the point

closest to schools to encourage them to respond to community needs [Ethiopia]. It is at this level that significant improvements can be made at relatively low cost.

- ***Involve children actively in matters that will affect them***

There are almost no societies where the idea of children being consulted or participating in decision-making is not controversial. The judgement as to how to engage with this issue has been made differently in each case, depending in part on the character and previous experience of programme initiators. Only in one case was there from the start an openly stated aim of increasing children's participation, and even here it began as an academic vision of child-centred approaches rather than practical measures to work with children [Peru]. In other cases children have been asked their views about schooling, but when it comes to improving schooling they are seen more as recipients of adult efforts on their behalf rather than potential contributors to the process [Pakistan]. In many cases the programme initiators who came from a community development background had not considered the possibility of children's participation, but the logic of their own experience made them willing to experiment [Mali. India]. In situations where even the idea of village ***adults*** having a role in decisions about schooling was a new one, programme staff have broached the issue tangentially, demonstrating that children have insights to offer and know more than adults give them credit for [Mozambique].

The vital link between schools and society

Education reforms of a bureaucratic/technical kind are unlikely in themselves to make a long-term difference to what disadvantaged children experience in school, unless accompanied by changes in perceptions about the functions of schools and their relation to society.

- ***Lever for more responsive national systems***

It is important to look for ways of influencing national systems to be more responsive. This is needed both to secure changes achieved locally, and hopefully to encourage a spread effect of some of the more successful innovations. Such attempts are most likely to produce an effect at a time of historical change which makes officials themselves aware that they need to find new ways of coping with problems. [Mongolia is an example for a national state system having to reorient itself, Ethiopia for a newly decentralised regional authority]. The studies give examples of attempts to

- support the state system to re-think the function and forms of schooling [Mongolia]

- support the state system to implement progressive policies [Lesotho]
- use experience at district level to influence developments nationally [Mali]
- support children/parents/teachers/other professionals to contribute to debates on school reform [Peru].

• ***Reduce the divide between learning at home and school by involving parents***

The adults most closely connected to the children should necessarily be central to any process that decides what children need to prepare them for the future. They are better placed than remote officials to suggest how practical problems in school provision can be overcome, and regardless of their own educational level can contribute to devising more relevant curricula [Mali, Ethiopia, and India]. But special efforts are needed to encourage them back into this role because generations of over-professionalisation of schooling have persuaded many parents that they are not educated enough to contribute. [Almost all the cases include an element of trying to get greater involvement by parents and the immediate community; those that have succeeded are also those where there has been most progress on making school relevant to children's life experience.]

• ***Promote 'civil society' groups that can renew the school-society link***

To develop more appropriate and responsive systems will require a renewal of the connection between schools and society. This requires an engagement with a broad range of local groups and structures who could be initiators of such a renewal. A variety of other organisations can contribute to this process and the international NGOs role is to facilitate such processes, and promote broad based alliances. Two examples here represent different styles of long-term local/international NGO relationships: one characterised by a creative dialogue [Peru] to devise ways of encouraging responsiveness; and one in which the evolution of the programme has been entirely the work of a local NGO [India], but with Save the Children providing critical financial support and trust over a long enough period to create the space to experiment, and later offering opportunities to share the experience with a wider audience. Some programmes have many partners [Lebanon] as a vehicle for wider dispersal of ideas, or have worked through a broad network partnership of local NGOs, government institutions, employers, and international agencies [Pakistan]. Others that have communities or the state education system as their main 'partner' also work through local NGOs for specific aspects of the work [Mali]. In situations where there are no local NGOs working on a particular issue, Save the Children has supported people to form one, being a 'coaching' partner in the early stages [Zimbabwe].

- ***Recognise that change processes in education do not need to be led by educationalists***

Many of the individuals who initiated new approaches in these programmes had little previous experience of work in education. They were generalist development workers, responding to expressed needs in the community, with a special concern for the needs of children; if they had specialist experience it was in health, water, nutrition, credit, emergencies. Where they felt the need of specialist advice on education specific issues, they brought in someone else short-term to help them work out an approach, and then took that forward independently. In some cases the lack of awareness of - for instance - effective learning methods has caused those managing education programmes to miss opportunities; but their success in other areas demonstrates that many of the strategies needed to improve educational provision are common sense. Much can be achieved by drawing on wisdom and experience in the community itself, and involving a wide range of relevant people in working out new approaches

- ***Demonstrate that a child- and community-focus leads to effective forms of education***

Even where there is little current possibility of influencing the current system it is important to demonstrate that more holistic and child-sensitive approaches to education are possible [India], have a developmentally positive effect on children and their communities [Lebanon] and can contribute to the resilience even of children with damaged lives [Liberia]. In the cases here, the programmes that went furthest in experimenting with methods or approaches to curricula that were new in that context were able to do so precisely because they were not trying to work within the state system; they may nevertheless eventually have an impact on it.

- ***Promote genuine educational processes, to achieve long term effects***

All of these studies suggest that the question of how to sustain innovations in education is not primarily a matter of financing. Changes in attitudes can affect styles of school provision in ways that could be sustained by systems after the end of the programme activity with minimal outside input [Lesotho]; and the effects of even short genuinely educational experiences can be life-changing for individuals [Liberia] and have a diffuse effect through a whole community [Lebanon]. Essentially we are not looking for a set of one-off changes that will stay in place but a ***culture of responsiveness***, whereby all those involved in the educational process continue to be involved. In the Mali case the curriculum has been adapted to meet the needs of children in the project villages; but as life pressures change it will need adapting again. What we hope will last is not that particular curriculum, but the experience gained by all parties that parents, teachers (whether qualified or not) and children can contribute things from their life

experience which professionals cannot, and that a process which involves them is one which delivers a more appropriate schooling for children.

Change from within, and the role of outside support

The case studies suggest strongly that there are no 'global solutions' to these problems. Strategies have grown out of an engagement with the opportunities or limitations of particular contexts. New approaches that are pushed from the outside and do not accord with how the communities concerned perceive things are unlikely to last, and a new approach to schooling will only take off if accompanied by a social movement that comes from within that society. International NGOs cannot create such a movement but their activities can provide critical supports to its development, particularly in contexts where local people are overwhelmed by practical problems. To work in this way requires a sensitive awareness of the dynamics of local/outsider initiatives.

- ***Support processes that make sense within that culture and context***

It is significant that almost all the programmes in these studies are managed by nationals of that country, and that the most innovative approaches have emerged where the people who are acting as catalysts for change have developed the closest relationship with the community and drawn on indigenous cultural sources [India.]

- ***Use 'outsiders' where there is a specific need, but with a high priority on sensitivity***

The limitations on the role that can be played by people seen as 'outsiders' needs to be recognised, but there are some contexts where outside experience is an essential feature of what the programme provides. The critical factor then is how sensitively this relationship is handled [Mongolia]. There are also occasions when the outsider/local distinction is blurred. In one African country [Lesotho] an African woman from a neighbouring country, though definitely seen as an outsider, was culturally more attuned than someone from Europe or America could have hoped to be; but conversely, in a programme that mediates between white farm owners and African labourers [Zimbabwe] the programme was led by a white Zimbabwean who could communicate well with both parties, having herself grown up in rural Zimbabwe, speaking Shona with mother-tongue competence.

- ***Aim for a balance between local decision making and organisational values***

The many different ways of tackling problems in these studies reflects Save the Children's basically decentralised structure. Staff in each country decide whether, where and how to get involved in education, and guide the development of the programme. There is some input by staff based in the head office, both in offering a menu of

possible approaches tested elsewhere, and through visits to prompt critical reflection [Mali] but only in one programme [Pakistan] was the international view the main influence on strategy choices. Some of the studies reflect shifts in response to policies being articulated on the basis of experience across many countries, for instance a recognition that simply by rebuilding schools one cannot be sure that children benefit from them [Mozambique]. While the organisation's values of what is good for children define the programme's intentions, they are interpreted within each culture [Peru] and with a pragmatic acceptance of what it is possible to achieve in each context. This sensitivity to local contexts is critical and contrasts with some styles of international agency activity which are seen by people locally as insensitively pushing their own agenda.

- ***Encourage interaction between local and international experience***

There are situations (particularly in remote rural areas) where management by people locally employed bring the benefits of local understanding but the limitations of lack of exposure. Here the contribution of supportive outsiders can, at its best, have a strong facilitating effect. One such programme [Ethiopia] with a now well-established and effective style of problem-solving, benefitted from inputs early on by two outsiders, one national and one international, who saw the need to train local staff in participatory approaches. Active learning and child-sensitive teaching methods is another area of skill likely to be introduced by someone with other-country experience, but if appropriately interpreted in the local context they can take root quickly because they so obviously meet a need in the children which traditional methods do not [Liberia]. And in politically tense situations, an outsider who can identify with what local people are going through but does not personally have to carry the burdens of the situation to the same extent, may have energy spare to be supportive and to mediate tensions. [In Lebanon the programme has been managed by Palestinians but has benefitted from the dedicated support over many years of two international staff members.]

- ***Give a high priority to the personal qualities needed by a facilitator***

The above examples indicate that while the local/outsider distinction is important, what matters most are personal qualities. Effective catalysts for change are usually individuals who learn from the people they work with, are sensitive to their way of seeing things and respectful even where it differs from their own, carry lightly the fact that they have a higher level of education or a higher social status, are easy with people of many kinds, and have a genuine commitment to improving opportunities for disadvantaged children. This may seem an unrealistic set of requirements but such people exist and the importance of finding them for this kind of work can hardly be overemphasised for the philosophy and style of work of any organisation depends ultimately on the individuals in it. [This applies across all the studies but the point is

made strongly in the Mongolia case.]⁵

Implications for donors:

The implications of these studies pose a challenge to the currently fashionable 'log-frame' approach of many donors, which requires proposals for funding to define objectives to a high level of detail before the start of a process, and who are willing to fund only strictly time-limited initiatives. What emerges here is that among the key characteristics of appropriate donor policies are that they should provide freedom to experiment, and a long-term commitment

- ***Recognise that to facilitate social change requires an open-ended approach***

Contributors to the studies with longer histories look back over different approaches used at different times. This attention to history reflects an organisational understanding that change is an organically developing process where experience continually throws up new aspects of a problem, and objectives will therefore need to be continually redefined. The approaches described here could not have evolved without the salaried time of a few key individuals to explore options and make the basic relationships, or the ability to fund research and other small initiatives to test approaches in that particular context. This was made possible by the fact that, though four of the programmes are now donor funded, in their initial stages all were financed from Save the Children's independent funding, allocated as a budget to each country programme to fund new programme initiatives. There is a vital role for donors willing to take the risk to explore and fund experimental initiatives on the basis of trust for the general style of work within an organisation.

- ***Commit funding to long term change processes***

The programmes included here have been supported financially and organisationally for periods ranging from two years [Mali] to eighteen [Lebanon], and in all except one [Liberia, a short-term measure in a humanitarian emergency] Save the Children has taken on a commitment to continue working in education in that area long enough to see complex processes through. This has involved an often disheartening task of trying to find donors willing to support that type of commitment. The logic of supporting longer-term processes is frequently understood by key individuals within donor agencies, but official funding criteria militate against this.

Campaigns for increased funding from richer countries to poorer (which Save the Children in principle supports) beg the question of the many negative effects of such indefinite subsidies ⁶, and these issues are beyond the scope of these studies. But three studies offer particular challenges to donor and international agency orthodoxies on the

issue of financial sustainability:

- ***Seriously marginalised communities: who pays, and for how long?***

In the India case, the project initiators are definite that the communities are so poor that it is unrealistic to expect them to support schools financially, and also that there is no possibility of the state taking over responsibility. They contend that without continued external funding there will be no schools for these children - and by extension for many millions of others among the very poor.⁷ By contrast, in Mali the programme has been designed in the hope that the state system will eventually take responsibility for schools initiated by poor communities; but though there are signs of progress in that direction, this in itself raises problems. Teachers in state schools interviewed during the research, though polite and officially supportive of the Save the Children programme, were clearly alarmed at the idea that its efforts to persuade the state to take responsibility for the newly created village schools might succeed, in which case they foresaw a trend in which many village communities would set up their own schools, the state would be under international agency pressure to take responsibility, and resources would be spread even more thinly.

- ***What happens where there is no state to provide?***

The Liberia programme relates to humanitarian emergencies. Here sustainability was not considered, for the state was not operational as a provider of services, and in any case the conventional system could not in any way have met the needs of these particularly war-damaged children. So those managing the programme were clear that here sustainability was not an issue; considerations of whether it might be possible to carry forward some of the useful approaches into the state school system only arose as the emergency phase of the programme was winding down. The children in this case are typical of millions world wide. If the main strategy of the international donor community continues to be to work exclusively through state systems, what happens to all the many children whom no state takes responsibility for, or for whom there is no state capable of providing?

CONCLUSION

Each of the studies is an example of 'micro' level activity. They have operated on budgets so small compared to those of multi-lateral donor projects that it would not be unrealistic to wonder what impact they can hope to have. The changes have been brought about by a few dedicated individuals, working in limited geographical areas. Yet the strategies developed in this way have potential for supporting change processes far beyond the immediate area of activity.

Scale and impact are difficult to compare meaningfully. The programme in Mongolia had national effect (in a country of 2.5 million people); the one in India works in a handful of villages (in the world's second most populous country.) In the first case the effect is diffused over many institutions in the society; in the latter the effect is concentrated, and has brought about profound social change in those areas where it works. Scale is not the essential issue here. The value in these experiments lies not in the actual number of children affected but in what the studies suggest about appropriate ways to go about the task. Collectively they present a picture of real progress on issues where 'macro level' activity has often failed.

Acknowledging all the unanswered questions, we can nevertheless state as an overall conclusion that positive change in education *can* be achieved even for the most disadvantaged children, and in the poorest parts of the poorest countries, given a modest extra input of resources, both human and financial. This conclusion has profound implications for the potential of schools to counteract the damaging effects of a divided world, and to contribute to positive development.

We highlight three features that appear to be most instrumental in achieving positive change:

- **The vital link between schools and society**

The primary role of international agencies should be to support styles of school provision that renew the vital link between schools and society. This will involve supporting school users to be more pro-active, and supporting governments and other providers to be more responsive to the contributions of communities and children. It will require decentralised school systems flexible enough to renew the link between schools and society, and respond to local conditions, to changing times, and to a gradually increasing sensitivity to what children experience.

- **Schools in the best interests of the child**

Although none of the studies refer to the statement in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that in matters that affect them decisions should be guided by 'the best interests of the child', this in fact forms the common philosophy that runs across them. We can summarise it in the statement that for schools to be good for society they first have to be good for children; or, that education systems will not produce a developmental effect in society unless they have a developmental effect for the children who have to go through them.

To fulfil children's right to education, all adults who are in position to influence styles of school provision need to reflect on what children experience in school and how this

relates to their real life challenges. Current power relationships (in both school systems and society) do not intrinsically foster such an approach, but in all societies there are groups and social processes which can be supported which could take a lead in developing more relevant and child-sensitive styles of schooling.

- **Change from within, and the creative value of diversity**

There are certain fundamental principles of how international support should be used. Most are fashionable at the level of rhetoric, but less common in practice. International support can be damaging if applied without sensitivity to these principles, and positive if they are understood and acted on. We can now summarise what we mean by 'appropriate' styles of work for those who aim to be catalysts for more responsive schools. They will need to be clear about the desired direction of change and target activities towards it. They will need to engage with the particularity of each context and support change processes that grow from within, led by people from that society who have been part of its political history and whose fate is tied up with its future. The role for international NGOs arises from their potential to support diversity and to support local experience so it can inform wider policy debates.

The studies are a statement of the need to recognise the creative value of diversity in a world where global 'solutions' are being pressed in all areas of life. There is nothing odd about this perspective coming from an international organisation, for there is no necessary contradiction between being open to learning from experience from elsewhere while retaining a home-grown understanding. Gandhi summarised this neatly:

I want the cultures of all peoples to blow through my house as freely as possible, but I will not be blown off my feet by any of them

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

What does it say about education?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a legal framework that makes signatory governments accountable to their citizens and to the international community, to show that they are attempting to meet its provisions to the extent possible within available resources. The two articles specifically on education are:

Article 28, Education for all: All children have a right to education. It is the state's responsibility to provide at least primary education free to all, drawing on international assistance where necessary to ensure this right. Styles of school discipline should reflect the child's human dignity.

Article 29, The purpose of education is to develop children's personality and talents, to prepare them for active adult life, to foster respect for basic human rights, and a respect for the child's own culture and those of others.

Four general articles have a direct bearing on what should happen in schools:

Article 2, Non-discrimination: All rights apply to all children without discrimination on grounds of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion and citizenship.

Article 3, The Best Interest of the Child: In all actions concerning children the best interest of the child should be a primary consideration.

Article 6, Survival and Development: The state has an obligation to protect a child's right to life, and to ensure that children are able to develop fully.

Article 12, Participation: Children have a right to express opinions in any matter which concerns them, and their views given due consideration in accordance with their age and maturity.

Taken together these articles have implications for content, style and methodology. Schools cannot fulfil these rights without drawing on active learning approaches, fostering creative thinking, developing the skills of problem solving, inculcating social awareness, providing for an interaction between school and life outside it, and expecting respectful, encouraging relationships between adults and children.

NOTES

Contexts of disadvantage

¹ For a discussion of the rationale of international agency involvement in education, see chapter 2.

² See Kimberly Ogadhoh and Marion Molteno, *A Chance in Life*, Save the Children, 1997.

³ As for instance in the publications that have emerged from the Jomtien 'Education for All' decade; from UNICEF; UNESCO; DFID; Oxfam; etc.

⁴ The words 'programme' and 'project' are potentially confusing because used differently by different organisations. In Save the Children, as in several other UK-

based NGOs, a 'project' is a smaller scale undertaking, usually one defined activity, whereas a 'programme' means a range of interconnected activities in one country intended to have a more far reaching effect; while in the World Bank a 'project' refers to a set of activities far larger in scale than an NGO 'programme'. Some international NGOs use 'programme' in an organisation-wide sense rather than about activities in one country (i.e. the overall approach of that organisation in that sector.)

⁵ See Marion Molteno, *Education at the margins*, keynote paper for the conference of that title in Cambridge, April 1998.

⁶ See Felicity Hill, *Cost Sharing in basic education*, paper prepared for this project.

⁷ See Rachel Lambert, *Education for the children of pastoralists*, paper prepared for this project.

⁸ cf Perran Penrose: The Education for All thrust of the 1990s was really about extending what might be described as the national/bureaucratic models of basic education, and seeking ways in which customers for this bureaucracy can be enticed to subscribe to its services. In spite of the fiscal impossibility of gaining and retaining children in the formal systems which have evolved, based on bureaucratic curriculum structures, restrictive labour practices and cumbersome and meaningless assessment systems, most attention is paid to making an unworkable model work.' In a memo to Oxfam commenting on their Global Action Plan for Basic Education, July 1999.

What can an international agency do?

¹ A movement for an internationally recognised Children's Charter was in fact started by Save the Children's founder, Eglantyne Jebb, in the aftermath of the 1st World War. Save the Children (UK) is now one of 27 national-based organisations in the Save the Children Alliance, whose common base is the CRC. The CRC has been ratified by all but 2 governments, of which one is the USA.

² One of the far-reaching implications of this is that *smaller* inputs of donor aid, well targeted to support local processes, are more likely to achieve beneficial effects than larger ones without any attention to involvement by local people. The Mali study gives an example of this dilemma in the situation faced by SCF(US) when a successful community schools programme had been built up in 700 villages. The *essential* element of the experience was the involvement of villagers, which it would be impossible to get going within the new timescale.

³ See Joachim Theis, *Education of ethnic minority children in Vietnam*, paper

prepared for this project.

⁴ See also Shon Campbell, *Supporting basic education in conflict* (examples from Afghanistan); paper prepared for this project. Save the Children staff in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have also worked with others to produce a *useful Minimum Package for Basic Education in conflict areas*.

⁵ Across all Save the Children's education programmes, the generalisation holds that the more effective programmes are led by such a person/people. Where it has not been possible to recruit individuals of this kind, this results in a set of activities that do not achieve much however well thought out they appear in principle.

⁶ A key dilemma here is that donor aid in one area may simply release state from responsibility and enable them to shift resources elsewhere. Jacques B Gelina argues that an alternative to donor-dependence is possible, in *Freedom from debt: the reappropriation of development through financial self-reliance*, Zed Books, 1998.

⁷ For a stimulating discussion on issues of sustainability, and the related development agency dilemmas about 'Scaling up and replicability vs. Influencing', see Pawan Gupta, *A view from the South*, paper prepared for this project.

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SECTION II. WHERE THERE IS NO SCHOOL

[Learning for Life in the hills - A community school experiment - A case study from SIDH, India \(Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas\)](#)

['We have waited thirty years'* - Village schools and the state system - A case study from Mali](#)

The problem:

- No schools for the 'hard to reach' children

The approach:

- NGOs as initiators of community schools
- The India study
- The Mali study
- Challenging exclusion in the state system examples from Zimbabwe and Lesotho
- Possible roles for an international NGO

Issues:

- Are community schools a viable option?
- Are community schools sustainable long term?

THE PROBLEM

No schools for the 'hard to reach' children

Many millions of children have never been to school because there is no school for them to attend. The problem is familiar; the 'Education for All' movement has

attempted to tackle it through donor support to governments to build new schools. Collectively these efforts have only scratched the surface of the problem.

The groups of children who are disproportionately excluded from schooling are sometimes described as 'hard to reach'. A large proportion of these are in the remoter rural areas of Africa and Asia, and clearly the demographic problems of thinly populated areas do present special problems to education planners. But the phrase is also used to cover other groups - slum children (where density of population per potential school is hardly a problem), and children in communities with lifestyles different from the mainstream - for instance children of pastoralists in Africa or Asia, Roma children in Europe. Though lack of resources underpins lack of provision, the attitudes of school providers determine how they distribute those limited resources. NGOs who work with marginalised communities are convinced from their experience that those in positions of authority are less concerned about the educational needs of some children than others, and that class attitudes of educated city dwellers towards the rural poor have a lot to do with the issue.¹

¹ See Pawan Gupta, *View from the South*, paper prepared for this project

Viewed from a child's perspective, it is the school which is hard to reach because it is too far away. This section looks at experiments that aim to bring the school to where the children are.

THE APPROACH

NGOs as initiators of community schools

The studies in this section are from remote rural areas in parts of the world where enrolment figures are lowest: South Asia and Africa. Each describes a small-scale experimental project where community schools have been developed through villagers' own efforts, stimulated and supported by project initiators from outside. The studies were selected to show two contrasting approaches. Each raises important issues of sustainability, community management and the roles of different actors.

The importance of external but culturally sensitive project initiators emerges in each as a central condition of success. The villagers' motivation is high, for they see schooling as a route out of the poverty trap for their children, yet their disempowerment is such that without outside support there would have been no school project. The outsiders harness and strengthen community capacity to develop their own responses to their development needs.

The India study

The project initiators in the India study are representative of an indigenous Indian tradition, of NGOs set up and led by a few dedicated individuals with a vision of social transformation. The Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH) was founded by two people who balance their western style academic education with inspiration from Gandhian ideas and the practice of Vapassana meditation. The study charts the organic development of a project with 'tribal' village communities (elsewhere they might be described as 'ethnic minorities') in the hill country of north India, over a ten year period. It concentrates on the processes and philosophy of SIDH, highlighting the potential of communities to take responsibility for their children's schooling. It is a strong example of responsiveness at work -openness by the project initiators to community inputs, and willingness by all to profit from experience, increasingly to listen to children, and to adjust direction accordingly.

The gains of this approach are tangible. Project village schools have succeeded better than the state system in giving children an effective basic education, measured both in examination results and in more qualitative social benefits. The children have had that rare type of schooling that is an education in the broad sense, developing their creative and critical faculties and sense of social responsibility. The adults have felt their own human capacities enlarged in proportion as they have risen to the challenge of guiding their own development. The model of schooling is genuinely adapted to the specific conditions of these children's lives.

The relationship between the local and international NGOs is founded on the fact that the local group needs funding and the international one can provide it. But the degree to which this relationship too is an empowering one lies in the value the international NGO places on the intellectual and cultural independence of partners. By providing funding with few strings attached in the initial phase, Save the Children gave SIDH the security to experiment, enabling it to bring a responsive process to a point where the mechanisms for change have been understood and can now be shared more widely. A dialogue has begun between state and NGO providers both within the district and beyond, and this experience can now serve to challenge the limitations of conventional school provision.

The Mali study

The study from Mali represents a situation (typical in Africa) where the same problems apply but where there were no local NGOs with the potential to act as effective initiators. Save the Children's Malian staff thus assumed a role essentially similar to that of the initiators of SIDH; but the fact that the project was developed by an international NGO has given it a significantly different form.

Save the Children's staff had one clear advantage over a local NGO; despite their

geographical isolation they were linked in to the potential for international sharing of experience which an international NGO can offer. They were thus able to pre-plan a process which has been remarkably effective in a short period of time. With the clear aim of developing a model for wider replication, the initiators limited project activities to two villages, closely monitored all stages of the project and, in contrast to SIDH, built in collaboration with state officials from the start. Because of the need to keep the state system on board the project is less open-ended and therefore perhaps less genuinely responsive to village concerns. But there are compensating strengths. Where the SIDH project intends to influence through a diffuse process of sharing insights, the Mali project has a tightly planned set of activities aimed at encouraging ownership of the project by the state system, and has engaged from the start with the problematic question of financial sustainability.

Challenging exclusion in the state system

To complement these studies, this section ends with two summaries of cases where the cause of exclusion was not that the children lived in a remote rural area. The examples are from two countries with the highest overall enrolment rates for Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, but where certain groups of children have been denied the chance to go to school, on grounds clearly linked to attitudes among school providers:

- In Zimbabwe the excluded children are an economically defined group, children of agricultural workers on the large commercial farms. They are also seen as an 'out' group by the authorities, being descended from migrants from Mozambique.
- The Lesotho case concerns children with disabilities. As in many other societies it has been assumed that such children could not attend a 'normal' school, but special schools were not an option for most children.

In both cases the starting point was to tackle the attitudes of the systems that exclude. Stated positively, this is a question of cajoling or inspiring the adults responsible for those systems to adopt more inclusive approaches. Save the Children was able to do this because of its 'neutral' status as an international NGO, but also its recognised child advocacy role and international experience.

Possible roles for an international NGO

Together these studies demonstrate a range of roles for an international NGO in trying to overcome problems of exclusion:

- Supporting a local group which can act as a sensitive community

initiator

- Taking the role of community initiator, plus liaison with the state
- Using its neutral position to mediate on behalf of excluded children
- Supporting the state system to become more inclusive, through tackling attitudes.

ISSUES

Are community schools a viable option?

The two case studies demonstrate that community schools can be a viable option in offering a useful education opportunity to children who were formerly not in school, under a structure that can be sustained by community management. But they raise many unanswered questions - beyond the scope of the studies, but ones which will need to be considered by anyone hoping to profit from their experience.

Taking the concept of community schools in its broadest sense to mean schools which exist as a result of community contributions in kind (labour and materials) and/or cash, there has been an increase of community school initiatives through the 1990s, supported by local and international organisations, in situations where there is no state provision. This expansion can be causally linked to budget cuts in state education spending and the introduction of mechanisms for cost-sharing, often driven by donor and lending policies. How do we see the future of such experiments? Do they simply provide the state a let-out clause from its obligations to provide basic education for all? If a parallel system of schooling becomes a large-scale phenomenon (as it has been for many years in Bangladesh) will children be able to transfer to the state system and pursue their education? Will community school certificates be recognised by employers? Will they offer schooling of lower quality and thus reinforce cycles of discrimination against disadvantaged children? Will they unintentionally free the state of its responsibility to allocate resources to schools for the most disadvantaged, resulting in an even less equitable resource allocation?

The studies suggest that the answers are not simple 'yes' or 'no'. Both studies highlight that it is important to prepare children to complete the state curriculum, so that they can transfer to mainstream education at a later stage. But each has negotiated space to experiment in content and methodology, convinced that without this children would neither get a useful education nor succeed in more conventional school assessment terms.

On the management side, both studies show that communities can play a more active role in running schools than state systems are willing to recognise, and that this involvement contributes positively in a number of ways. It encourages more children to

go to and stay on at school. It promotes local ownership and accountability for schools. It makes schools more responsive to local needs and conditions. The studies also demonstrate that villagers with a minimal formal education background can become effective primary teachers given appropriate levels of support and training, illustrating that teacher motivation is almost certainly a more important qualification than formal training.

Are community schools sustainable?

There are several aspects to the question of sustainability, and finance is only one of them. (The question of ownership is touched on above.) But it is the issue of structural and financial sustainability that most bothers critics of the community school approach, so it is important to see what light the two case studies throw on this.

The two studies show a significant divergence in approach. Both SIDH and the Malian team believe that overall responsibility for education provision lies ultimately with the state, but equally recognise the importance of engaging community resources to extend schooling opportunities to remote areas where the state fails to provide. Accordingly both projects draw on what the respective communities can contribute in kind (labour, materials and the provision of a school structure) and in cash to cover the recurring cost of teacher salaries and resource materials. Where they differ is on what they consider legitimate demands on the community to achieve financial sustainability. SIDH emphasises that the community is among the poorest in the world, and cannot possibly be expected to support a school system. Its strategy is to keep costs as low as possible but to continue to seek external inputs. It mitigates the project's dependence by drawing on a variety of sources. Apart from practical considerations their rationale is one of equity: it is socially unjust to place the burden of school costs on an already poor community when other groups have access to state-financed schooling.

The Mali team take what may be perceived as a more extreme view: until such a time as the state can be persuaded to assume responsibility for a proportion if not all running costs, the community will be obliged to cover all costs, despite their poverty, and even in drought years. Whether this is viable in the long-term remains to be seen but it is certainly a strong example of what can be achieved at community level in extremely difficult circumstances.

The question of responsibility for school provision raises many dilemmas about rights and moral standpoints to which there can be no uniform response. But the principle needs to be maintained that responsibility carries with it the power to decide. 'Cost sharing' imposed by the state without genuine community involvement is an unacceptable mechanism, and has a completely different effect from a community deciding to carry part financial responsibility for schools they have set up themselves.

We are brought back to the primacy of quality and purpose: even the poorest communities are prepared to contribute to the costs of their children's education, provided the education on offer is perceived to be both useful and relevant, and has been developed with their active participation.

'They produce the wealth, but their children have no schools'

Advocating for children on the commercial farms in Zimbabwe

Commercial agriculture is the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy and is the largest single earner of foreign currency, producing most of the country's wealth through exports of tobacco, horticultural products, tea, coffee and sugar. Yet surveys show that the labour force which ensures this productivity is not sharing in the benefits. Farm workers and their families who comprise about 20% of the country's population are in the unique situation of both living and working on someone else's property, where government provides no services.

The farm worker community has fallen between the neglect of government and the indifference of many farm owners to the living conditions of their labour force. In the decade before independence in 1980, a bitter guerrilla war pitted the black majority against the ruling white minority (which included all commercial farmers). Most social development efforts were halted; in many areas schools, clinics and dip tanks were abandoned or destroyed. Since Independence the government's focus has been on the 'communal' areas (where black Zimbabweans live under traditional land tenure.) It has been loath to invest public resources on private property and has been able to ignore the plight of farm workers because they are seen as being an 'out' group ethnically (originating from migrants from across the border) and lack political representation. On the other hand farm owners have been affected by drought, falling prices on global markets, and the uncertainty related to land tenure, and were reluctant to invest in anything not directly related to improved profitability - including services for their workers. Historical distrust between government and farmers has prevented dialogue on action to correct the situation.

Save the Children is one of the few NGOs that has attempted to work in this difficult and tense environment. As a partner in a health care programme during the 1980s it established credibility as a broker between farmers and government, and in the 1990s has used this unique position to negotiate for pre-schools to be established to look after children while their mothers are at work. The programme expanded rapidly, drawing in several government ministries, and by diplomatically engaging with the situation on each farm has encouraged active support for the pre-schools from farmers' wives, farmers and farm workers. The quality of care given to children has been lifted through

- giving workers the skills to erect outdoor play equipment, with materials donated by farm owners, and to install proper sanitation for play centres
- training provided by Ministry of Education trainers
- encouragement to integrate children with disabilities.

The very success of the pre-schools has highlighted the stark situation that on most farms there are no primary schools for the children to go on to. The few schools that exist are privately run, with teachers paid by the farmers. They are not government registered so the teachers do not need to be qualified. Save the Children is now promoting dialogue between farmers and government to get schools registered and to find ways to establish new schools in under-serviced areas. All parties are being encouraged to find ways to improve the quality of teaching in farm schools - through in-service training, better resources, more books. The programme is now advocating for a review of what is taught, to produce a more relevant curriculum than the current highly academic one.

'She came to school without speech, but she now she speaks!'

Including disabled children in primary schools in Lesotho

Lesotho is a small mountainous kingdom. Herding animals is the main source of livelihood in the mountain valleys, and the lowland fringe where agriculture is possible is increasingly subject to erosion. With too little land to support the people, men traditionally go to work on the South African mines, with resulting pressures on boys to leave school early. But education is highly valued, following a long tradition of mission schools.

As in many other societies, disabled children have traditionally been kept at home, out of sight; if schooling is considered, it was assumed it would have to be a 'special school.' In the 1980s, stimulated in part by the liberation movements of neighbouring South Africa, groups of disabled people and parents of disabled children became inspired by concepts of social justice, and there was a rising demand for the state school system to provide for disabled children. USAID funded a study which led to a significant shift in national policy - children with disabilities would be integrated into mainstream schools.

Save the Children was invited to support the Ministry to turn this policy into practice. It had a high profile within this small-scale society as an 'education conscious'

organisation, having provided sponsorship to see through school many children from poorer families, some of whom went on to occupy responsible positions. It also had considerable experience on work with children with disabilities, both worldwide and in Lesotho, where it had supported a community based rehabilitation programme.

The key support offered by Save the Children was to second an educationalist to work as part of the Ministry of Education team responsible for implementing the plan. A Zimbabwean woman, she brought a sensitive understanding of cultural issues as well as extensive experience of work on disability. At the same time, the Lesotho Head of Early Childhood Education was sent to the USA to build up skills within the Ministry.

Teachers' attitudes and skills were recognised as the key factor to change. In ten pilot schools a core group of teachers received intensive training and on-going support; they then became powerful advocates for the new approach. A feasibility study had in fact found that integration was no new concept: over 17% of all primary children had some sort of impairment which affected their education and teachers were overwhelmingly in favour of integration and tried to help slow learners. It also highlighted the downside of 'special education' institutions, which cut across the role of the extended family, were costly, unable to meet more than a minority of needs, and were even detrimental to the child's emotional well-being. Teachers, parents and children have all become positive advocates for the approach. 'Mathabo came from home with her mouth always open,' says one teacher's report, 'but now she can close her mouth, even when she is not reminded. She came to school without speech, but she now speaks!'

The new approach blended the best of traditional Lesotho approaches with specialist knowledge from outside. Curriculum materials were developed indigenously - culturally appropriate and reflecting local conditions. International inputs were low key, targeted, and complementary to national capacity. The programme also stressed that disabled children's educational needs could not be seen in isolation, and brought in broad-based participation of all those who might have an input: parents, organisations of disabled people, professionals and different government ministries.

Learning for Life in the hills - A community school experiment - A case study from SIDH, India (Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas)



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What are the problems for children?

Hill Life and the Schooling System

A particular feature of India, in addition to its high population density, is its enormous diversity geographically and in terms of ethnic make-up. Within this there are important divides between urban and rural life and wealth, with an increasing gap between upper and middle income groups and the majority who live in extremes of poverty. A legacy of colonialism is the importance attached to education. Though the state is in principle committed to providing basic education for all, the scale of need and resources required to extend access to India's many remote areas stretch beyond the capacity of government structures. Problems of access are compounded by problems in quality as reflected in high levels of non enrolment, drop out and levels of literacy which fall to as low as 15% in the more remote areas.

Across the country over the past decade, there have been many new initiatives to pilot approaches to improve both the availability and quality of education in rural areas.

These have generated a range of examples of good practice that should feed into wider policy making. This case study describes the process through which the local NGO Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH) has made possible meaningful education opportunities to children in Jaunpur, an especially marginalised 'tribal' hill region of the Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Box 1: Hill Life

High mountains on one side of the winding road, and sheer drops to the Aglar river on the other, with tiny villages perched dangerously along the steep sides of the mountains. These are familiar sights while driving, on an early morning, towards Jaunpur in the Central Himalayas in India. The sight of rugged mountains which don't have slopes but sharp drops can often fill a newcomer with wonder and dread. It seems physically impossible for any creature to climb that steep mountain side, but one suddenly sees a few shapes emerge onto the road from somewhere below. The first is a young boy with heavy cans of milk on his back. He is on his daily 4 hour walk to the town of Mussoorie to sell his milk and will return only very late in the evening.

The other figure looks strange - like a tree with legs. One recognises the form of a woman below the waist but she has no face; only foliage. And this is just one of her many journeys in a day. She has already fetched water, cooked food and is now staggering back with the fodder. She must come again with her cattle, leave them to *graze* while she collects firewood. Somewhere along the day she also has to eat, clean and take care of children. Of course her daughter is looking after the little ones at home, but she is young and finds it difficult to manage. Her son started going to school but, as the nearest government school was in another village, he was not able to make the steep climb to school till he was older, by which time he left because felt ashamed as he was so much older than the rest of the children. Now he helps his father by going to Mussoorie to sell the milk while his father is free to work in the fields.

Jaunpur is characterised by remoteness and difficult access. Located a couple of hours drive from Mussoorie, a hill station about 300 kms from Delhi, its mountainous terrain can make a marathon out of a mile. Spread over 500 kms it has a low population of 55,000 living in small, scattered villages of between 7-35 families, living off agriculture, animal husbandry and occasional waged work during the tourist season in Mussoorie. The terrain is hilly and communication is poor. With only one erratic daily bus service, people are accustomed to walking for hours to reach the nearest market, school, health centre or post office.

The problem of isolation is common to most mountain villages in India. What sets them

apart is the fact that they are administered from a state where the majority population lives in the plains (UP population 150 million, 12 hill districts population 6.5 million) and their tribal culture, for which they are feared and considered "backward". These factors serve to further compound their marginalisation and chances of education. The **average** literacy rate for Uttar Pradesh is 55% whereas in Jaunpur it plummets to 30.82% for men and 12.10% for women².

Box 2: Tribal Culture of Jaunpur

It is the tribal culture of Jaunpur which makes the people distinct from the rest of the hills. They trace their origins to Pandavas of the days of the Mahabharata, a famous epic of India. Both polyandry and polygamy are practised and the people feel it is their way of keeping the land and family together - physically, socially and emotionally. They brew wine and both men and women drink and dance together. Because of these differences, the region and its people are both mocked and feared outside Jaunpur. People from Mussoorie are scared to go there for fear of being 'bewitched' as it is considered a land inhabited by witches and black magic. Along with fear, the people from Jaunpur are also considered to be quite 'backward'. "Don't behave like a Jaunpuri." is quite a common remark one overhears between friends in Mussoorie. This has made the people from Jaunpur very defensive and introverted. They do not trust easily, suspect outsiders and take a long time to make friends.

Despite low educational levels. SIDH research into local attitudes to education showed that primary education was the top priority for tribal villages ³. Education was seen as a way of breaking out of their traditional isolation and bringing new opportunities. The research was thus able to dispel a common assumption that "village attitudes" are an obstacle to education and focus on the main problems, which were identified as follows:

- ***Distance from school***

Primary schools are currently provided to the lowest administrative unit, a **gram sabha** comprised of 6-7 small villages. Given the small, scattered nature of hill villages, it is not considered a viable proposition to have a school in every village. In practice, this means that the bulk of smaller and inaccessible villages are left out of the schooling system as young children cannot physically undertake the climb, easily 3 hours in each direction, to the nearest school.

- ***Low enrolment of girls***

The ratio of girls to boys is uniformly low throughout India, mirroring women's low social status. Although the Jaunpur tribal culture is polyandric, granting women

relatively higher status than other parts of India, girls still have heavy domestic responsibilities and cannot accommodate both the lesson time and walking time. The result is a more acute girl boy ratio in the hills.

- ***Child labour***

In common with many rural communities, family livelihoods in Jaunpur depend on the contribution of children ranging from tending animals to looking after younger siblings. Child labour and education is a shared issue with the Mali case study and is covered in more detail in the Pakistan case study in section 2.

- ***Irrelevance of education***

The government curriculum does not reflect urban/rural or geographical differences and bears little relation to the realities of hill-life. Within these, distance from school emerged as the dominant problem alongside the need for greater flexibility and responsiveness of provision. This analysis combined with the widespread desire for education provided the opening and direction for SIDH's work in the area.

The Response

The role of SIDH

When the founders of SIDH first made contact with villages in Jaunpur, they had no funding and no development experience. They were a middle class couple from the city with Gandhian orientation, the husband an engineer, the wife a primary school teacher with Montessori experience, who were inspired by Vipassana meditation to ***'get out of the trap of urban life and start something which we thought was more meaningful.'*** (Anuradha Joshi and Pawan Gupta, Founder Members of SIDH)

Four beliefs encapsulating the spiritual and practical have underpinned the work of the Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH):

- The importance of a 'micro' approach. SIDH's ideology is that small is not only beautiful but more effective to promote diversity and innovation and resist the trend of 'monoculturalism.'
- The importance of responsive programming achieved through on-going monitoring, reflection and modification.
- The importance of respect for local traditions and knowledge as a way

to empower and restore identity to marginalised communities and develop culturally relevant and effective training and education programmes.

- The importance of personal transformation and self-esteem for the promotion of social change.

At the insistence of the community, the founders of SIDH warily agreed to support education provision in one village. Against advice sought from development practitioners (*'don't start a primary school, it requires long-term commitment and long-term funding'*) and drawing on the former education experience of Anuradha as well as other education experiences, they registered SIDH as an NGO and set out to pilot a community primary school initiative.

The First Primary Schools

The aim to maximise community responsibility for the initiative was present from the outset, based on an awareness of the limitations of the state to extend school provision to individual villages and the value of community ownership to secure any level of sustainability.

The decision to start a school modelled on the state system reflected the wish of the community: only this would offer their children the option of continuing their studies to a higher level in government schools.

The first primary school was planned for a village 3 hours walk from the nearest school where approximately 10 out of a total of 40 children aged between 6-15 were currently attending school. The roles of each party were agreed: the villagers would provide the volunteer teachers, the classroom and teaching material while the founders, Anuradha and Pawan, would offer teacher training to the volunteers, undertake some teaching and facilitate management of the school. Within only three months, the community had cleared land, built a small two-roomed building for the school and designated four young boys who had passed Grade 10 as volunteer teachers, marking their level of enthusiasm and commitment. The training of volunteers initially consisted of observation of the couple's teaching of the government curriculum and special tutorials in the main subjects of maths and language. As the demand for schools in the area increased, a 5 day crash course for all volunteer teachers was introduced on a monthly basis to train them in teaching the curriculum of the following month and subsequently two new schools were opened.

Box 3: Vipassana meditation and its importance in the SIDH programme

The beginnings of SIDH as an organisation can be traced to a time in mid 80s when we attended a 10 day meditation camp in 'Vipassana' (literally meaning, to observe oneself), a Buddhist technique of meditation which made a radical impact on their lives. A scientific meditation technique, 'Vipassana' is completely non-sectarian and devoid of any rituals, mantras or imagination. It seemed an effective way to bring about an attitudinal change and to internalise concepts like work ethics, commitment, finding a meaning in social work, and above all in understanding 'Dharma' as 'law of nature' instead of belief in any particular religion, sect or ritualistic practices.

'Vipassana infused us with enough courage to get out of the trap of urban life and start something which we thought was more meaningful. We felt that it was an important technique to trigger off the process of personal transformation. We have used it to orient our team towards internalising values of social responsibility. All the 50 Sidh team members have undergone at least a one -10- day- course in 'Vipassana'. It helps them to cope with frustrations and negativity's (jealousy, hatred, greed, anger etc.). The best way to cope with negative feelings is not by suppressing but confronting them, which can be done by simply observing the breath. As long as the negative feeling remains, the natural rhythm of breath gets disturbed by either becoming faster or slower. By simply observing the breath and not reacting, it slowly comes back to its normal state. And when the breathing is normal one finds that the negativity has also disappeared'.

This technique does not always bring about dramatic changes in adults, but the results of a 3-day children's meditation course (only with children over 8 years) have always yielded positive results. Every' morning the children in SIDH schools begin their day with a 10- minute practice of observing their breath. Teachers who meditate regularly with students claim truly remarkable results. There is a marked improvement in concentration, memory, as well as behaviour of children. One teacher even succeeded in reducing the number of petty complaints and thefts in his class by asking children to confront their greed by observing their breath and was surprised to notice that the number of complaints from children dropped from 3-4 a day to only 4-5 a month.!

Anuradha Joshi and Pawan Gupta, Founder members of SIDH

The growth of the programme heralded the need to move from a voluntary approach to securing funds for continuity and to cover, as a minimum, a stipend for the volunteer teachers who would otherwise need to seek paid employment elsewhere. This led to the registration of SIDH as a legal association and private fund-raising for the schools.

The experience of these initial primary schools has lead to a general policy of starting

primary schools in those villages that request one and are able to provide space for classes, provide local school-leavers for teacher training, and ensure that they will send village children (girls and boys) to school.

By 1998, the programme included five primary schools with a total of 220 pupils, 65% of which attend from 19 neighbouring villages. This represents a coverage of 82% of children from these villages, who would otherwise be left out of the government system. The ratio of female to male has progressively increased and currently stands at 40:60 which is considerably higher than government schools in the area.

As the schools became established, the pupils started to achieve better exam results than pupils from the government schools do. The added credibility this gave to SIDH increased community confidence and provided the space for SIDH to experiment with more innovative learning methods (described in the next section) and to respond to other community needs ⁴.

Starting Young

A pre-primary (*balwadi*) programme grew out of the primary school programme and took working through village teachers a step further - local young women with around five years primary were selected by their community as teachers and given training and support by SIDH. The programme was initially started as a response to children's needs: a) to offer an appropriate learning environment for young children b) to free up older children, especially girls, from their childcare duties, thus enabling them to attend primary school. Spin off benefits soon became evident:

- ***improved access for girls***

Originally intended for the pre-primary age group, the pre-primary schools started to accommodate primary age girls as well in response to local demand. The pre-primary system was found to be more appropriate for girls of early primary age as the shorter hours were better suited to the girl's domestic workload; the less formal teaching methods and environment were attractive to girls who had never attended school; they could bring their young charges, as young as 6 months, which was not possible in primary school. This process has achieved a ratio of 45:55 in favour of girls.

- improved primary school attendance and completion Children who have attended pre-school are more likely to go on to primary school and less likely to drop out:

'If they go to the balwadi, they learn faster and much more. My son went to the balwadi before joining the government school when he was four. He knows all the letters in the alphabet and tables up to 5. His

friends who went to the government school don't know the first letters in the alphabet.' Naro Devi, mother, from Riyat village ⁵.

- *a safe, stable environment for children*

The **balwadi** provides a space in a child's life that is safe, secure and constant and can be formative in paving the way for a stable adult. This is important in the lives of hill children where the pressures of daily life on the women can lead to erratic child-rearing behaviour. By 1998, there were 13 **balwadis** with 207 children, representing a coverage of 99% of children in the 2-5 age group. These findings are borne out of nine years experience ⁶.

Girls' access to schools

The success of the pre-primary programme led to a pilot initiative to increase access to school in remote villages by up-grading the levels of the pre-school to include the first primary grades. Known locally as the **Balshala** Programme, it was aimed to increase enrolment of children in general and girls in particular and thus help bridge the move to primary education. The rationale was based on the findings of regular monitoring of the existing primary and pre-primary programmes:

- **drop out after pre-primary:** children from remote villages without a primary school in the reachable vicinity tended not to continue their education due to the distance and time involved in commuting to the nearest primary school;
- **distance from school and length of school day:** the principle reason for low girl attendance at primary school was inability to combine schooling with domestic workload and travelling time to the school;
- **demographic change:** a progressive increase in the 6-8 age group and decrease in 2-5 age group rendered the running of a school exclusively for the pre-primary years unviable;
- **cost effective mechanism for improving access: balshalas** allow for the in-take of both younger and older children until they are ready to go to primary school at an only marginally increased cost than running a pre-primary and considerable lower cost than running a primary school;
- **increasing experience and skills of teachers:** once the local young women had developed the skills of pre-school teachers, experience proved that they were able to progress to teaching lower primary grades with limited but well-targeted up-grade

training combined with regular support and supervision provided by SIDH staff.

The piloting of three *balshala* schools catering for 43 children rapidly demonstrated a healthy impact in relation to the education of girls:

- a significant increase in enrolment of girls (average ratio 49:51 in favour of girls). This was linked to the introduction of shorter teaching hours (3 hours instead of 5-6 at primary level) which were better suited to girls' domestic workload. In addition, while boys were likely to be encouraged to attend school in a neighbouring village, girls would not be, on account of the additional commuting time and potential dangers. In villages where there was no school, older girls were more likely to attend the combination and pre-primary schools (*balshala and balwadi*) in higher numbers.
- a significant increase in enrolment of children from poorer families
- empowerment of young women and girls: employing local young women as teachers in the combination and pre-schools (*balshala and balwadi*) has offered a positive role model and encouraged girls' education in the area. This is starting to have a noticeable impact - girls have started studying to a later age and as a consequence are marrying at a later age. They have also gained in confidence and are able to speak up about gender discrimination with the elders within the community.
- a flexible schooling option especially well-adapted to the context of small remote villages where there is considerable fluctuation in children of a given age group at any time. This issue is dealt with in more detail in the next section on Flexible Provision.

Flexible Provision

A flexible approach to school provision was found to be essential in the hill region to accommodate the low numbers of school age children in a catchment and the workload of children. Four mechanisms were developed to make primary education more accessible to children:

- *A culturally adapted schedule:* from the outset the holidays of the primary and pre-schools were organised according to the local calendar and festivals. This represented a marked difference with government schools which followed the holidays prescribed centrally.

- ***Flexi-time:*** this was introduced in primary schools based on improved attendance and enrolment of children, especially girls, in the 3 hour shift system of the pre-primary and - combined schools and on monitoring of irregular attendance of children in primary schools which revealed demands on older children to complete their household work prior to going to school. Initially a two shift system of three hours in the morning for grades I and II and three hours in the afternoon for grades III to VI was introduced. This model was adapted after a year in response to demands from the more affluent members of the community to offer a longer day to children. The adapted model, currently in place, offers a maximum of flexibility and learning time for village children. The concept of a two shift system remains but older children are encouraged to attend the morning shift and work independently on an assigned project while younger children are encouraged to do likewise in the afternoon. The advantage of this system is that children who cannot allocate a full day to school do not miss out on regular lessons while those who have more disposable time can channel this to pursuing further learning.

- ***Multi-grade teaching:*** this was introduced early on as an efficient mechanism to accommodate the small numbers of children per class within the two classroom space of each school. The normal practice in all SIDH schools is for one teacher to manage more than one class. Training covers methodologies for teaching different grades simultaneously, such as group work etc.

- ***Adaptability to fluctuation in numbers of school age children:*** a characteristic of small villages is considerable fluctuation in school age children. The beauty of the schooling system developed by SIDH is that it provides flexibility for schools to vary their focus from primary to pre-primary in response to child population dynamics. For example, the combination ***balshala*** schools described in the previous section were opened in villages with a declining pre-primary age group and increasing primary cohort. Similarly, a primary school in a small village with a dwindling number of school age children was down-graded to a combination school (***balshala***) while the primary school in a nearby village was strengthened.

An extension of the flexible approach was the creation of non-formal evening education centres. These were started for the older children (drop outs or those who had never had the opportunity to attend school) who continued to be left out of the education system out of embarrassment to attend formal school with younger children and because the daytime schedule did not fit around their daily tasks. The diverse make up of the group, aged between 10-20 with mixed abilities provided a challenge to develop a more relevant curriculum.

IMPROVING QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

The mechanisms for improving access involve responsiveness and therefore automatically have an impact on quality. This section will focus on the three distinct areas that collectively have helped improve overall quality of schooling. It will also summarise the spin off activities that have further improved the quality of education opportunities in hill villages and show how education activities can be a stimulus for wider community development.

Towards a more relevant curriculum: a holistic approach

The issue of a more relevant curriculum was slow to emerge. Since the initial focus was to improve access, communities were content to see their children in a regularly functioning school, seemingly doing well. Teaching was done through the prescribed government textbooks with the introduction of non-academic subjects such as art, general knowledge, spoken English and projects to offer a more comprehensive learning base to the children. More substantial changes to the curriculum were progressively made in response to the questions "why education and what is the purpose of education?". But within these changes, a constant aim was to retain the prescribed curriculum as a basis to allow children from the village school the option to continue within the government system.

As the schools became more established, the need for more curriculum relevance and more child-centred learning methods to encourage problem-solving and critical awareness emerged as pressing priorities. The urban, middle class bias of the government textbooks created problems for pupils and teachers, all local, using concepts and examples that were alien to their experience. Ideologically, it raised concern about undervaluing rural life in favour of urban life and stirring feelings of inferiority in the rural child. This concern was poignantly expressed by village women:

'sitting on tables and chairs removes our children from the ground and makes them lose respect for our land''our children and especially our daughters no longer want to dirty their hands by touching the fields or cattle anymore now that they are literate' ⁷

A workshop was held for the teachers and SIDH staff specifically to tackle the complex questions of: 'what is relevant education?', 'what should be the broad contents of a relevant curriculum at primary level?'. This workshop turned into a milestone for SIDH:

'In retrospect we never realised the potential of this workshop during the planning stage or even when it was taking place... we did a workshop with an objective of making the existing curriculum a little more relevant but came up with a radically different holistic curriculum' Pawan, Gupta, Founder Member of SIDH.

Implementing the shift towards organising separate subjects thematically is proving ambitious. An initial plan to develop textbooks for each grade on each theme, integrating the relevant elements of the government textbook has been shelved due to lack of capacity, time and funding. What is now being tested is a more modest approach, taking groups of related subjects at a time and developing guidelines for teachers on how to creatively integrate these using existing textbooks. For example Hindi language can be taught with the help of the textbook prescribed for social studies. Early monitoring of this approach suggests positive impact, attracting a lot of interest at the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) who want to share it with the different state resource centres:

- the new guidelines are proving an effective tool for improving the quality of education using existing textbooks, with limited extra cost
- integrating subjects offers students and pupils more time to do projects and discuss topics they themselves identify as relevant

Box 4: Workshop on education and curriculum

The main outcomes of the workshop were:

- Agreement on criteria for relevant education, including skills, information, knowledge and attitudes teachers
- Agreement that the existing curriculum did not match these criteria and was generally not relevant
- Recognition of the need to make education more holistic so that the child is able to relate classroom education with the world outside
- The identification of themes under which the traditionally separate subjects of history, maths, languages should be integrated where appropriate.

The following themes were identified:

Nature: air, water, earth, flora & fauna, time

Self: health, nutrition, hygiene, personal development - home & family

Awareness: information (village, block, district, state, international), social origin, (local geography, history, culture, traditions), political & administrative structures,

Life science: work & energy, agriculture & animal husbandry, vocational training, manmanagement skills

In addition, the workshops looked at creative ways to raise issues such as value systems and social responsibility within the curriculum. This resulted in agreement to explore such concepts in relation to the local context and belief systems: justice was discussed through a case study of a village quarrel and analysis of strengths and weakness of the traditional **Panchayat** system of meting justice. Special emphasis was given to promotion of self-esteem to tackle the downsides of universalization of aspirations through education and encourage critical questioning and analytical skills in the children. Experimentation with school projects to gather information about the local environment, history and culture has yielded positive results. Learning about their own realities has increased the children's sense of self- worth and enhanced their learning and analytical capacity. It has also actively involved the community thereby creating an important link between schools and the community.

Working with local teachers and building local capacity

Getting good teachers in remote areas is a common problem. The trend in India as elsewhere is high teacher absenteeism in government schools

- teachers aspire to an urban post with little commitment to the task of their rural assignment. In community education programmes where there is usually not even the attraction of a normal teaching salary, using local people as teachers and building up local capacity is the only viable alternative (the use of local teachers is also covered in the Mali study, grouped under this section). With this in mind, SIDH has worked exclusively through local young women and men. with a minimum of education, to encourage both a more sustainable programme and local participation. The training of these teachers has been central to the quality of education in the schools and has taken different forms which together represent a holistic approach aimed at developing the teacher as a person as well as his/her teaching skills. How to inspire child-centred, responsive teaching in new teachers whose only experience was the traditional rote learning of government schools was the key challenge.

A series of steps in training were tested which aimed to operate at the teachers pace.

The first were visits to other local education programmes to promote learning from other experiences but primarily to broaden exposure of teachers whose life experience had largely been limited to the hills. These demonstrated new approaches to education provision and more child-centred learning techniques in practice.

The next step was to offer intensive training in child-centred learning techniques and lesson design (covered in more detail in the next section) and give teachers the space to experiment. Since the young people were all new to teaching, training was organised as an on-going process designed around the principle of learn, trial, assess, refine and try again. While the trainings were different for the primary and pre-school systems, they followed the similar pattern of an intensive training session every few months followed up by shorter monthly sessions for discussion on problems and solutions and the next month plan. Regular support and supervision by the SIDH team were built into this process to create a favourable working environment for the new teachers. However, as the new teachers became more competent and confident, they assumed more self-monitoring and peer group learning techniques which in turn helped develop their autonomy and ability to naturally expand from teaching into the wider domain of community development.

Eventually as the programme started to grow and include training of trainers, the most effective teachers from the first round were able to train the new intake. The advantages of training local young people have been felt early on and have resulted in notable advances in the quality of education provision:

- continuity in teaching and reduced absenteeism: local teachers have a genuine commitment to the villages and children and to doing a good job;
- local understanding and knowledge: local teachers appreciate the realities and difficulties facing pupils and bring a wealth of local knowledge that can feed into the design of a more relevant curriculum;
- openness to adopting more child-centred learning techniques: having bypassed the formal government teacher training system, local teachers tend to be more responsive to adapting the child-centred learning techniques offered by the SIDH training programme;
- higher education levels: statistically children from the village schools achieve higher Grade 5 exam results than their peers in the government schools and have been observed to have a more questioning and analytical approach to learning;
- building a strong and confident teaching team able to constantly work

on improvements and innovations in their teaching programmes. In the longer term, the intention is that this approach of building up local capacity can:

- pave the way for a community school system that is potentially manageable and sustainable in terms of human resources;
- promote a model of community development, using schools as the connection, that is well-adapted to small, scattered hill villages.

Developing more appropriate Teaching Methodologies

• *Child-centred learning*

Once the decision to work in education became a reality, SIDH started to consider how to make learning child-centred. This belief in the importance of a child-centred approach stemmed from Anuradha's former experience of the Montessori method and the positive learning outcomes she had witnessed. The challenge was how to introduce this approach in communities whose only albeit limited experience of education had been through rote learning methods and who inherently believed in the value of this system.

Child-centred learning, being based on the need of the individual child, represents a major shift from the standard government approach which views children and classes as a collective. A gradual approach was developed as the most appropriate to accommodate the attitudinal change that would be required for child-centred learning to be accepted. This involved:

- visits by trainee teachers to programmes already using child-centred techniques;
- training in child-centred techniques, showing the value of learning through play or practical activities, small group work where children learn through each other etc;
- experimentation of these techniques in a classroom setting;
- discussions with villagers to familiarise them with the aims of the new techniques.

It was only by experimenting with the new techniques and seeing the learning benefits

for themselves that teachers became convinced of the effectiveness of the approach and started to use it more widely. Gradual introduction of these techniques in the primary schools met with little community resistance: the schools were there at the request of the community and enjoyed their full confidence. What was important was that the children attended and were seen to be learning. There was less concern about the methods.

The pre-primary schools presented more of a problem: they evolved as a perceived need of the teachers rather than the community who had no former experience of them and was initially wary of what they could offer. Regular parent teacher meeting at which teachers demonstrated their methods - how children learned numbers and other skills through a song or a game - helped develop awareness and trust until village women began to feel the benefits directly, both for themselves and their children. Interestingly, the *balwadi* experience revealed the importance of balancing the use of teaching methods. Following exclusive use of learning through play methods, traditional rote learning methods were introduced as they were seen to be effective when integrated with play techniques:

'Initially it was just song and dance. Now we see them working on slates. We know if we don't have the time, they'll get cleaned up at the balwadi. It's helping women get together to work in the fields - earlier when we got back from the field it would take us time to find them. It also makes them cleverer'. Phainto Devi. mother, Talogi village ⁸

A children's magazine "*Apni Baat*" (Our Voice) has recently started to encourage children to express themselves and sensitise teachers and parents (it is used in teacher parent meetings) to what children are experiencing. This has proved a useful tool as revealed in the following quotes:

'... My mother says it is not important to go to school everyday. It is enough to go once or twice a week. I cannot explain it to her'. Pupil

'After reading the children's complaints, I had a lump in my throat. For the first time I could see the world from their eyes. I used to beat the children sometimes but I have really changed. I rarely use the stick now and it had made me enjoy teaching more than before.' Teacher ⁹

• *Developing Appropriate Testing Systems*

Different testing techniques have been developed which complement the child-centred learning techniques and shift the emphasis to what the child understands over what the child has learnt by rote. Through these, evaluation has taken on a new meaning both for

the children and the teachers, becoming a mechanism for monitoring individual progress.

- Open book testing, which allows pupils to consult books during exams: this has had a positive effect on the attitude of pupils and teachers. Involving teachers in setting test papers with questions to elicit the conceptual understanding of the child rather than the ability to reproduce, has led to more creative teaching with more emphasis on promotion of understanding and learning skills. Similarly, pupils place greater value on comprehension and learning how to learn.
- Grading: this system of marking is favoured over the rigid numerical one as more effective way to monitor personal progress.
- Self-evaluation and standardisation: teachers are encouraged to monitor their own progress and take control of their professional development. So that this can be standardised across teachers and facilitate external assessment, a book was developed for teachers to define their daily lesson plans and assess achievement against what was planned. This serves as an effective monitoring tool for teachers as well as for supervision.

Taken together, these assessment systems offer the opportunity for evaluating the entire system, from teachers to pupils to supervisors to training. If a pupil performs badly this is a reflection of the ability of the teacher which is linked to support etc. This holistic approach is very different to the government system where poor results tend to be attributed directly to pupils and are not taken as symptoms of problems within a wider system.

• *Using the Local Language*

Language is not an issue in Jaunpur as it is for other tribal areas. The local sub-dialect of Garhwali, spoken in the hill villages, is mutually comprehensive with Hindi, the medium of instruction for all UP government schools, and shares a common script. Where SIDH schools have the advantage over government schools is that teachers, all local to the area, are able to explain complex concepts in the local dialect which facilitates understanding for the children.

• *Developing Appropriate Materials*

So far we have looked at how a more relevant teaching curriculum was developed. In addition SIDH has consolidated its experience by developing a range of training manuals and teaching materials all with an emphasis on making teaching more relevant to hill life and concerns. These provide an unprecedented resource for both teachers in

the Jaunpur catchment and teachers in the hill area generally.

Simultaneously, SIDH has supported the production of a range of materials on the local history of the area, the environment, a cassette of children's songs etc. These are all pioneering, important per se in recording and giving value to the local culture, but also as resource materials for lessons and post-literacy.

More recently, SIDH has started to establish village libraries which represent a valuable resource to pupils, teachers and other literate groups in remote villages where there is a dearth of reading material and post literacy support. Over time, these libraries have turned into a kind of community centre where users have access to daily newspapers, magazines and games in addition to books and informal discussion groups have started facilitated by the local teachers.

Education and community development

The education programmes offered SIDH a progressively deeper understanding of community dynamics which in turn stimulated more responsive programming. They also provided a focus for wider community action, generating new ideas and responses. This is best reflected in the women's programme.

The women's programme evolved out of the close links developed with mothers through the pre-school programme. It started with women's involvement in the school (as they learnt more about the aims of the school, some of the mothers became directly involved in the programme, working alongside the teachers as assistants) and the formation of parent teachers groups. Gradually these grew into women's groups where wider problems and needs were discussed such as health, nutrition, and the need for credit. Within these, the teachers assumed more of a facilitator role, sharing information on other initiatives in the area such as schemes for solar cookers and water harvesting, connecting them with training in identified priorities such as market gardening and articulating their concerns within SIDH.

The formation of these groups has been mutually beneficial to the community and to SIDH. Through the groups, village women have been able to diversify their productive activities (in some villages women have expanded their agricultural activities to include new crops of peas, potatoes, peas) and have been empowered to ask for a more equal role for women in the traditional justice system. Listening and learning from the women has equipped SIDH to fine tune the relevance of the education programmes and to accurately articulate the concerns of women in larger forums.

The emphasis SIDH has placed on development of human resources in the local community offers a sound basis for villagers to take an active role in the development

of their community and locality. The existence of vibrant women's groups can be considered a move in this direction.¹⁰

Costs, Benefits and Sustainability

Small NGO programmes are continuously asked if they make a difference and if they are cost-effective and sustainable. These are all valid questions but mask some of the complexities that underlie them: make a difference to who, cost-effective in relation to what, sustainable on whose terms?

Table 1: responsibility for running village schools

Area of Responsibility	Role of SHDH	Role of Village Education Committee
Fundraising	Secures external funding for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher salaries - training - materials e.g. books 	Generates income though: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collection of school fees - growing seedlings for sale - school vegetable gardens, produce sold locally - greeting cards made by pupils for sale by SHDH
Financial management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increasingly channels fund to the - school bank account - provide training & support to - VEC on financial management - monitors school bank account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manages the school bank account - issues payment for salaries & materials
School Infrastructure	- Provides materials e.g. cement & steel.	- Provides labour & land
Teachers	- provides training & support	- Nominates new teachers & monitors attendance
Teachers salaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - securrs funding - transfers funds to school bank account 	- pays teachers from school bank account

Teaching materials	- help develop materials	- purchases materials after consultation with teachers on requirement
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SIDH is continuously faced with such issues in an environment where issues of scale tend to dominate the education agenda. In looking at costs, the critical element to take into account is the small size of the villages and their remoteness. On average there are 25 children in a SIDH village school/pre-school and despite efforts to increase the student-teacher ratio through multigrade and flexi-time methods, the ratio remains low, resulting in proportionately higher costs. In addition, difficult terrain and lack of communication facilities incur more expensive supervision and monitoring costs. A direct comparison of SIDH school costs with the UP state system is difficult to make as government figures are not desegregated for the hill schools and do not appear to include all levels of state and central assistance. Although education costs per child appear significantly higher in SIDH schools than the average per capita cost for UP state, largely due to the low student/teacher ratio (15:1 in SIDH primary schools compared to an average of 63:1 in government schools), this is likely to be misleading in the specific case of the hills.¹¹

SIDH's approach to the long-term sustainability of schools is both pragmatic and philosophical. It starts from the standpoint that total self-reliance of the school programme in the hills is in economic terms an unachievable goal given the small size of the villages. Philosophically it holds that any attempt at total self-sufficiency would further discriminate against the already low educational chances of this marginalised and economically poor community.¹² However, it recognises that in conditions of scarce resources, a form of cost-sharing, based around greater community input to and responsibility for schooling, is an efficient way of improving education provision in the longer term. Consequently, SIDH has developed an approach that builds in a) a level of external financial assistance and b) seeks to maximise the role of the community in managing and supporting village schools and keep costs at a minimum level. The community role is channelled through the Village Education Committee (VEC) which has progressively assumed substantial management responsibilities as set out in the table below:

The growing capacity of the VECs in the management of the schools and finances bodes well for the long-term sustainability of education provision in the hills. This is likely to be further enhanced by the formulation of VECs in villages outside the SIDH catchment, their formal recognition under the new system of local government which grants VECs powers to inspect school records, and the formation of an umbrella body which meets quarterly to discuss education issues collectively and feedback to the district education department. The

effectiveness of the VECs is a mark of the success of SIDH's local capacity building approach and offers a positive example of how local NGOs are uniquely well-placed to promote community development.

Financially, a certain level of sustainability has been achieved through the cost-sharing approach. Cost-sharing is currently high on the national and local agenda as a mechanism for overcoming reduced public spending on education. It works at this localised level because the communities themselves are committed to the benefits the village schools offer their children and because the sharing extends critically to allowing them a say in how the schools function. The dependency of the programme on external funds to cover core costs such as teacher salaries is inbuilt for the reasons given above and is the weak point in the overall economic sustainability of education provision in the hills. SIDH is currently the sole source of funds. With the expansion of the programme and costs, SIDH's strategy is to diversify its funding base beyond Save the Children and to help link the villages, through the VEC's, directly to local funding sources such as the local Rotary Clubs.

So far, we have concentrated on the economic aspects of sustainability over the broader benefits of the programme. These benefits, described earlier in this case study, are largely qualitative reflecting what the villagers and children feel about the programme. A recent external evaluation of the programme summarises these as:

- schools more efficient than government schools in this environment, offering better-quality and accessible education reflected in higher educational achievement of SIDH pupils than their government school peers;
- increased enrolment and lower drop-out rate of pupils;
- significantly increased enrolment of girls;
- development of human resources locally has enhanced potential for development in the area. ¹³

These represent important, but hard to quantify, social benefits in an area where education and life opportunities are limited. They show that money carefully spent within a wider context of local development can offer multiple advantages to people at the margins and reinforce the importance of giving people a voice in educational planning.

Replicability and Advocacy

As a small NGO, SIDH takes a hard line on what the role of a local NGO should be. Generally, NGOs are seen as filling a gap: assisting communities where government systems fail to function. There are inherent dangers in this trend: that NGOs become the tools for addressing the tough issues of poverty and development and the means for availing bi/multi-lateral aid while government accepts its failures in provision and abdicates from responsibility to disadvantaged groups.

Over the years, SIDH's work in developing an innovative and relevant primary and early childhood education programme in the hills has come to be respected in both government and non-government circles. This achievement has resulted in mounting external pressure to replicate the programme on a wider scale. SIDH actively resists this. From their perspective, the justification of the "small" SIDH programme lies not in scale but in demonstrating the importance of diversity in methodology and approach; sharing this with other education practitioners; finding ways to advocate for equitable and responsive education reform within the government system; raising the debate about what education is for and the limitations of what the dominant system delivers. This is a huge challenge for a small NGO and the different ways SIDH has tackled it offer useful lessons for other groups.

- ***Influencing through the media and seminars***

SIDH has written a number of articles in the national and state press as well as newsletters to generate wider understanding and debate about their experience of education in the hills. SIDH have also organised seminars to bring together systems and people - government officials and academics, NGO and community practitioners - on education issues e.g. "Education and Sustainability". The aim is to create the opportunity for interaction and improved understanding between people working at the macro level and local field workers and plant the seed for taking this forward into more responsive policy-making and practice.

- ***Influencing at national government level***

SIDH has been able to capitalise on the location of its office in the same town as the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, the training college for all government administrative officers. The SIDH programme is frequently visited by trainees as an example of complementary education provision while SIDH is invited to contribute its experience in training courses of both new recruits and senior officials on refresher programmes.

In addition, SIDH has been invited to participate on different national consultations on primary and pre-primary education. SIDH takes advantage of these forums to represent the specific problems of education in the hills and stress the importance of pre-primary

education in retention and enrolment of children in schools to challenge the government move to withdraw financial support from early childhood education programmes. SIDH has also developed a relationship with the National Council for Education, Research and Training who wrote up a case study of SIDH's education experience with special emphasis on multi-grade teaching that was circulated to government schools and education officials in all states.

- ***Influencing at state and district level***

SIDH is a resource member on the district gender and education committee for Education for All, the District Primary Education Programme and Total

Literacy Campaign. By advocating the advantages of the balshala programme (pre-primary schools up-graded to Primary grade II) as an appropriate model for mountain and arid zones where the small and scattered nature of villages results in more costly education provision, the concept has been adapted and adopted into the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), a large World Bank, European Union supported education programme. In the area of curriculum reform, SIDH has also achieved a level of influence. Its pre-primary teaching materials have been widely shared and used by UNICEF-funded Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) programmes and SIDH has provided training to middle level supervisory staff in the ICDS programme in Garhwal region. It has recently been invited on to the state resource group on the DPEP working on holistic curriculum design.

- ***Influencing at NGO level***

Over the years, SIDH has had wide contact with a range of national and district-based NGOs working in education. The most successful relationships have been with other small NGOs working at grassroots level in the hills. These have been conducive to fruitful pooling and sharing of experience and expertise - SIDH has been a resource for education, able to provide input in training and capacity building, and drawn in expertise in credit and agriculture, for example, as their programme has evolved. The least successful from their experience has been the new trend towards formation of formal networking groups. Intended to bring together divergent groups for mutual learning, collaboration and lobbying for change, SIDH has found a tendency to accentuate difference and competition between groups. It is difficult to monitor the impact of influencing actions. The fact that SIDH have a range of links with the government reflects the value accorded their work as well as their tenacity. The sheer scale and hierarchy of government systems in India make for frustrating relations and genuine obstacles in accomplishing change. In SIDH's experience, the success of advocacy work hinges on personal relationships at all levels. In government this is fraught with difficulties as transfers are frequent and by the time a relation is

established with an official, they move on. Although in the long-term this should still have beneficial implications in terms of increasing an official's openness to what an NGO can offer, it can backfire in the short-term: Just when the District Magistrate of Tehri, covering Jaunpur, requested SIDH to design a training programme for primary government teachers in the district, he was transferred and plans stalled.

SIDH feels it can have maximum impact in stimulating change by:

- small interventions at the local level that can make an immediate difference at the micro level -examples include motivating local government teachers to work more effectively through training or awarding a prize that gives public acknowledgement to their efforts
- mobilisation of people to form pressure groups to influence government policy. There is a long history of this form of popular mobilisation in the hill area and SIDH has been able to build on this by stimulating debate and action with communities, intellectuals and government.

The role of the INGO: Save the Children's involvement

In India where there is a thriving civil society organised into local associations, Save the Children works primarily through local partners. Its strategy for education has been to support a range of local NGOs aiming to improve basic education opportunities to marginalised, out-of-school groups and to explore lessons for good practice from diverse innovative approaches.

The decision to support the work of SIDH highlights two fundamental elements in the way Save the Children approaches working in partnership. Firstly, the importance of cultural relevance of development actions. By supporting SIDH and its uniquely Gandhian/Indian philosophy of starting with the individual to achieve collective change, Save the Children was acting on a development ideology which recognizes the importance of taking local context and needs as a starting point, and the value of pluralist approaches. Secondly, the importance of flexibility and risk-taking to promote genuine innovation and creativity in development programming. Support to SIDH represented a risk as the organisation was literally starting out and had no track record. Without start-up support and the flexibility to experiment with approaches, SIDH would not have been able to initiate what evolved into a valuable education programme for hill children. The significance of flexibility and diversity cannot be under-estimated within a wider development context that seeks to identify general models and anticipate outcomes in advance of action.

These and other aspects of partnership tend to be accorded highest value by partners.

SIDH have summed up the hallmarks of partnership with Save the Children as:

- trust and flexibility
- willingness to look at education from a holistic perspective and support extension to community development
- length of commitment and funding
- exposure to wider education thinking and initiatives through connection with education networks and regional meetings

The risk-taking, flexible approach is one that does also backfire. While adverse affects can be contained by close monitoring and communication, failure and learning from mistakes also have their place within the development process.

What has been learnt?

The SIDH experience demonstrates that it is possible to run a quality pre/primary education programme with community participation that is viable and relevant to hill life. Although context specific, it offers key lessons for community-based education programmes generally.

• *Working at community level*

The SIDH experience shows that villagers can take a leading role in setting up and managing schools in their vicinity given appropriate training and support. The essential factor is a sense of local ownership: that communities themselves perceive the need for schooling for their children and are actively involved in both planning and management of schools. Moreover, an external force is often a key to stimulating local development initiatives and harnessing local capacity. In this case the local NGO, SIDH, acted as a catalyst for promoting community organisation around schooling which, given the central role of schools in village life, became an important agent for wider community development. The essential elements of this approach were a sensitive combination of inputs of new ideas and external resources (financial and expertise) and responsiveness to local knowledge and priorities.

• *Working with local teachers*

The India study confirms the findings of other studies in the collection, most notably Mali and Lebanon: that local people with limited formal education can become

effective pre-school and primary teachers, given appropriate training and follow up.

It highlights two particular strengths of an approach to working with local teachers, firstly their local knowledge of and commitment to the area and secondly their potential to take on a wider role in facilitating community development.

- *An open-minded, responsive approach to community development*

SIDH started work in Jaunpur with a clean slate, with no objective other than to respond to the needs of the community. The organisation and its programme have grown organically and have continuously adapted through a process of continuous learning:

'We listened with respect to the community without any preconceived notion, as we were inexperienced at the time and also because we were not qualified as development workers. We constantly reviewed our programmes, were self-critical, tried not to get defensive and hence not resist change but try out uncharted paths if the idea seemed sound. In due course this became part of the culture of SIDH. To accept mistakes, correct it through change/experiment involves pain and courage. In fact the entire process of SIDH's evolution is a story of responding to the community and beginning to programme accordingly, learning new lessons during the course of implementation and again making changes in response to these new learnings.'

Anuradha Joshi and Pawan Gupta, Founder Members of SIDH

- *Adopting a flexible and holistic approach to education*

The successes of this programme have been achieved through experimenting, learning and adapting. The facilitators of the village school initiative were careful not to impose a model but to encourage a locally appropriate system to evolve, based on space to innovate, learn from mistakes and adapt. The programme also demonstrates the importance of a holistic approach to education, one that takes account of the whole needs of the child, in terms of its practical impact on content, design and outcomes. This approach enabled the development of a type of education that is **responsive** and **relevant** in content, reflecting local knowledge and learning priorities, and **flexible** in its organisation, designed around the seasonal, domestic and livelihood activities of hill children. Tangible benefits have included an increase in access, especially of girls, alongside an increase in quality - children from the village schools perform systematically better than children in government schools and have developed real learning skills. They have also included the potential for community school children to transfer into the government system, revealing an important guiding principal for any

extra-state primary school initiative: that it should complement rather than substitute the government system and enable students to integrate into the next levels of government education provision.

- ***The role of a local and international NGO***

SIDH's flexibility of approach and willingness to experiment have been critical factors in producing an education programme that is strong on relevance and quality. This process has required an equally flexible and open approach on the part of SCF as a major partner. At one level, the case study demonstrates how partnership based on shared vision and approach between a local and international NGO can contribute a) to provision of schooling to rural children where state coverage does not reach, and b) lessons for good practice that are of wider relevance to improving education opportunities to such groups of children.

The achievements documented in this case study have been possible largely because of the long-standing commitment of both the local and international NGO, which, over a decade, have supported a long process of building up local participation and capacity and introducing innovative educational approaches. The study also raises a fundamental dilemma: the future of such a programme. In a context where there is limited scope to connect village schools with the state system, we are left with the question of whether it is possible to achieve financial sustainability for effective, small-scale initiatives such as these that bridge the schooling gap for remote rural children.

Editors' Conclusions

- Isolated communities have the potential to take responsibility for their children's schooling. This potential can be realised by creative approaches which respond to local ideas and experimental initiatives.
- The village schools have succeeded better than state schools in providing effective primary schooling. However, the community still prioritised modelling the schools on the state system so that children would have the opportunity to continue in government schools later.
- Early successes - in enrolment, access for girls, and exam results relative to government schools - were important in giving the project initiators space to innovate further.
- The children's own magazine was an effective way to challenge teachers' and even parents' perspectives, and to develop children's confidence in expressing their views.

- The school and pre-school projects have naturally developed into broader community-led initiatives, such as the women's groups on health, nutrition and credit issues, which evolved out of mothers' meetings with teachers. These linkages have flourished because the programme was flexible, without the constraints of a rigid plan.
- It was recognised from the start that outside skills and ongoing funding would continue to be needed to empower marginalised communities, and that there was no clear way to make the project sustainable. This is an unfashionable approach to development agency orthodoxy, but is perhaps inevitable in a context where the government fails to provide schools for hill communities.
- The local NGO has sought to share responsibility for management and fund-raising with the Village Education Committees. This is paralleled by a changing role for Save the Children. Initially it provided funds and space to experiment. Now it is withdrawing from some of the funding, but is creating opportunities to link the project to related initiatives and to share the experience internationally.

Notes

1 Government of India, 1991. Census of India

2 Government of India, 1991

3 SIDH, undated. 'Evolution of SIDH's Education Programme.' Internal report, SIDH, Mussoorie, India

4 For greater detail on SIDH's work, see:-

SIDH 1996-7. Annual Report

CHETNA, 1998. Redefining Education for Holistic Development - Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas, Child Resource Centre, Gujarat, India

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5 Joshi, V., 1995. Little School on the Hill - Child Education in Community Development. Suraksha, Early Childhood Care and Education in India Vol. 3. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Madras

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13 Khanna 1999

'We have waited thirty years'* - Village schools and the state system - A case study from Mali

* Said by a villager. The end of the colonial period brought the hope of primary education for their children, but no school had yet come to the village



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What are the problems for children?

Rural poverty and education

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is part of the Sahel, an arid region south of the Sahara subject to severe droughts. Rural families depend on the labour of all members, including children, to survive.

Poverty acts as a determinant of educational chances at several levels. State poverty means that although education takes up 24% of Mali's budget, this provides schooling for less than half the children ¹. Primary school enrolment rates for 1993-7 were 30% for boys and 19% for girls, compared to 61% and 55% for all sub-Saharan Africa². Within Mali itself there are further inequalities: city children are much more likely to go to school than those in rural areas, and poorer districts have the lowest attendance. Finally, poverty limits educational chances at household level: in any district, children

of poorer families are less likely to attend school.

The people of Mali experience a type of rural poverty that is common in much of sub-Saharan Africa, but exists in the Sahel in an extreme form. Villages are far apart, and transport between them hardly exists, meaning children growing up in the Sahel are effectively isolated from anything outside their village. Can anything be done to help village children attend school?

Save the Children's experiment

Save the Children has worked in the northern district of Douentza, one of the poorest in Mali, since the severe droughts of the mid '80s. Within Douentza only 8% of children are in school. Douentza town is a centre of public facilities for surrounding villages, with government offices, a hospital, three primary schools and a secondary school. The cercle, or administrative district, has 255 villages, but only seventeen have schools³. For village children, 'going to school' means being sent to lodge with strangers in town. The lodging child is often treated as free labour, expected to work harder than other children of the household and given less to eat. Most village families, however, cannot even afford the cost of sending a child to lodge.

Box 1: The opening

The community has gathered to watch car-loads of city people coming to their village. Monsieur le President of the newly formed school committee leads the guests to the two-roomed building. Inside, the classrooms are cool, a shaded space in this fierce climate. The villagers press in close. It was the men themselves who cut the stones, the women and children who carried sand and water for the mortar. The furnishing is sparse but functional; a blackboard, a table, desks. The Save the Children animateur who has worked with the villagers has struggled to keep to a minimum the items brought in from outside, while the villagers have bargained hard for what they need. The speeches begin.

In the capital city of Bamako people who have never heard of Koubwel Koundia watch on the weekend news. What makes it news is not the event but the potential. For the first time in history this village has a school. If they can do it, why not others?

Save the Children realised that without a school education children have little chance of escape from rural poverty. The staff lacked education sector experience, but this was balanced by considerable understanding of the conditions of rural poverty. They set out:

- to understand what stops village children getting to school
- to experiment with ways round the problems.

Staff see the schools project as part of a wider set of activities intended to strengthen children's resilience in the face of poverty. Their starting point was thus to consider questions of schooling as they are experienced by villagers, both children and adults, rather than from the perspective of education officials or professionals.

They were also experimenting with a methodology. Would this bottom-up way of working give insights into how schooling could be made more accessible? And could an international agency facilitate changes in local structures (both governmental and communities) to improve children's educational chances?

A village view of children's work To consider the relationship between children's work, parental attitudes and schooling. Save the Children commissioned a study into patterns and perceptions of children's work in two rural districts (one being Douentza) and one peri-urban. The study confirmed what is obvious to most observers: 85% of 7 year olds in Douentza district carry serious work responsibilities, occupying on average 6 hours+ a day (with girls working significantly longer hours than boys.) A quarter of households said that they could not manage without the children's contribution. But it also made clear that the primary consideration in the minds of parents, even very poor ones, was the educational value of work: 'Children's work is perceived as a process of socialisation, progressively initiating children into work and transmitting skills that will enable them to support themselves and their parents and contribute to the community.' Parents expressed this in many ways:

The most important thing one can do for a child is to teach him or her to work.' 'Death can overcome the parents at any time; that's why it is essential to train children young to do the work of the parents'.

Box 2: Growing up in Mopti and Duentza

The regional town of Mopti is seven hours drive north of the capital city, on the banks of the Niger river. As the seasons change, herds of cattle are moved large distances in search of fresh grazing. Everywhere children can be seen taking serious responsibilities from an early age, herding animals, fishing, helping to move home, manoeuvring narrow boats through the flooded areas.

Douentza, a traditional town of mud bricks, lies several hours further to the north east. The many children who attend no kind of school are busy with the work they do for their families, fetching water, minding younger children, working in the market. At the other end of town the better-off families live in compounds where goats are tethered, chickens scratch, and young girls help their mothers pound grain and prepare food.

'Our daughters are married at 13 or 14 years. If they haven't learnt all the work of the household when they are young, how will they manage?'

When asked the reasons for a child not working, a common answer was 'the negligence of parents.' In other words, only parents who did not have their children's best interests at heart would let them grow up without work responsibilities.

Children too accept the necessity and value of work. Among those surveyed there were few instances of oppressive work conditions or abusive punishments. Two thirds said they liked their work 'a lot,' and only a negligible percentage said 'not at all'. Perhaps this is because children learn by doing tasks with obvious utility, for which they win approval: 'We work to have the blessing of our parents.' They can move around and be active, they are taught by familiar people, using a language they understand, and are given considerable responsibility - 74% of the children work most of the time without adult supervision.

But the occupations for which children are trained through work are those of their parents, and over 70% of both children and adults would prefer some other future, to which only school-going could give access.

What would make it possible for village children to go to school?

School attendance and family work are not seen as mutually exclusive. Villagers want for their children what only school can offer, but schooling will not be an option for most village children unless it is set up in a way that accommodates village life.

Of children who had never been to school, 30% said this was because there was no school in the village, 19% that they had too much work at home, 18% that their parents lacked the means to send them, 27% that their parents did not want to send them, and 32% gave other reasons. In a context where sending children to school means sending them away, almost all of these answers may amount to the same thing - schools are too distant. If the school is within walking distance, children who attend can still spend several hours a day working as part of the family and the family does not have to incur the cost of sending them to lodge.

Villagers defined a feasible distance from school as one that a young child can walk twice a day (coming home for food at midday.) That means a school in each village or each cluster of villages. Is it realistic to think this could happen? It is an issue for children throughout rural Africa, and the Sahel's sparse population and poverty present probably the most difficult contexts in which to attempt to tackle it.

Beyond the question of resources there are difficulties with the education system itself. Interviews with teachers and officials during Save the Children's initial study of the Mopti region gave a consistently inflexible message: the school system exists in a particular form. Children must fit into the system, or they don't go to school. The idea of modifying the system to take account of rural conditions does not arise⁶. Teachers must be urban trained (from an *Ecole Normale*, teacher training college). Only schools with a certain quality of building are recognised⁷. All children must attend for the same number of hours, regardless of distance and their work responsibilities.

For more village children to attend school requires not only tackling resources issues, but negotiating flexibility within the system.

Will children benefit from going to school?

For village parents, sending children to school is a gamble: *'Even if all the children could go to school, it's not certain they would all succeed.'* Success means eventually being able to earn a living in some other way. If this happens the family as a whole may be economically more secure. Children who go to school and drop out after a few years, however, may be in a worse position than those who never went. Both in terms of skills and motivation, they may be less prepared to earn a living in the only way now left to them.

'Our education system is ill' said a teacher from a Douentza town school, and his colleagues agreed the education being given today is sub-standard, inferior to the schooling they themselves received. Schools often have dilapidated buildings and few teaching materials, and it is years since most teachers had refresher training. They complained of lack of consistency in government policies and a lack of understanding of the stresses they are under. The first year teacher, for example, teaches nine hours a day, in two sessions of seventy children.

Within existing resource constraints, however, there are still choices. Save the Children staffs own observations went beyond those of the teachers to focus on the children's experience. Teaching is in French, which the children do not understand. They are taught by rote, with no liveliness or active participation. The teachers' style is typically harsh; children are visibly nervous.

The parent quoted above was being over-polite: the *majority* of school children fail. In Douentza schools, only a quarter of the children who started in year one are still coming to school after four years. The others have dropped out without having reached functional literacy. The biggest drop out is in year one. It does not take children or parents long to decide that staying in school will serve no useful purpose⁸.

There is little point trying to get village children into school unless something radical is done to improve what happens in schools. Accepting that almost any improvement would require extra resources, the challenge was to work out the minimum level: that is, the critical changes needed to make school learning sufficiently effective for it to be worth village children attending. The two selected were:

- ***Language***: the teaching for the first few years should be in a language the children understand, preferably the mother tongue, with a gradual introduction to French.
- ***Child-sensitive learning methods***: children should be actively engaged, rather than passively repeating. They should be encouraged, and not fear their teachers.

These are recognised internationally as key factors in effective learning. In the context of Malian rural schools they represent radical changes.

Language, the critical factor

In Mali, as elsewhere, a few innovative educationalists within the state system have been convinced of the benefits of using children's mother tongue for the first introduction to literacy⁹. But they remain a minority voice.

Several objections are raised. First, that there are hundreds of languages in Mali, and the education system would never have the resources to support teaching in all of them. But a national body called DNAFLA (which supports literacy for adults using mother tongues), together with IPN, the *Institut Pédagogic National* (which deals with curricula and methodology in schools) have identified a modest number of languages which would make literacy learning in a known language accessible to the majority of Malians. These include the two dominant language groups of Douentza district, the Dogon and the Peulh¹⁰.

A second objection is that it is impossible to implement mother tongue teaching in town schools where children of many languages study in the same class. But in villages this problem does not arise as most villages are composed of people who share a language.

The most deeply felt resistance comes from those who feel that French is the only suitable language for schooling. The point of going to school is to get a job, and for this French will be needed. Experimental primary schools outside the state system have been successful in getting children to read in their own languages, but unsuccessful in getting them places in secondary school because they do not know French¹¹.

A pioneering alternative curriculum, the ***Pedagogie Convergente***, seeks to avoid the problems of both the French-only and the mother-tongue-only systems. For the first years teaching is in the local language. French is introduced slowly as a foreign language. Once children are confidently literate in their own language, the balance changes, bringing pupils to nationally expected levels, ***in French***, by the end of year 6, and thus enabling them to continue to secondary school. The claim is that children can achieve this level because they learn much faster (by understanding what they are learning) and that the wastage of the French-only system is avoided.

The Pedagogie Convergente has been used in a few schools only. Headteachers in Douentza district had never heard of it, and were resistant. While the state theoretically allows it, it has allocated few resources for implementation. Save the Children concluded for a village school to be set up using the ***Pedagogie Convergente***, in the current Malian context, there would need to be outside agency involvement.

The Response

Testing a new approach

Save the Children's study of village life and the school system led it conclude:

Village communities want their children to go to school, but this would be realistic only if schools:

- are within a child's walking distance
- are responsive to village conditions, including children's work
- can offer effective teaching, starting in local languages.

The state education system

- lacks resources to provide new village schools
- is inflexible and unresponsive to changes needed to make schooling appropriate for village children
- permits the use of local languages, but this is rarely implemented.

Save the Children decided to act as 'broker' between the two parties. They took as a starting point lessons from Save the Children's international experience of education collaboration both with villages and the state system [see notes at the beginning of the chapter] and also from other NGOs/International NGOs in Mali. Two International NGOs, World Education and Save the Children (USA), have been active in community schools for some years and have significant programmes. Certain features of the

approach that Save the Children has taken are markedly different from both of these:

- The Save the Children approach is unique in responding to the specific conditions of remote Sahel communities, where the difficulties of survival and economic vulnerability are most extreme.
- Save the Children's project was planned to combine a close relationship with the community with a potential for scaling up within the state system. It is the first attempt to seek appropriate innovation within the state system for the needs of villagers.

Because Save the Children's approach grew out of an involvement with the people of Douentza that included concerns for health, food security and credit, there is a wider view of how village schools could fit into patterns of village life, and a wider range of strategies for the project's community workers to draw on when helping villagers establish and sustain schools¹².

It is worth noting that the experiment is taking place in a context of highly centralised decision making. Whilst there is talk of '*deconcentration*', key decisions on policy, budgets, school standards and teacher employment still lie with the central Ministry. In other African countries the move to decentralisation has created a positive 'space' for experimentation that might involve village communities more in questions of schooling. In Mali this is not the case¹³.

Though the project itself is small, its potential relevance is huge. If it succeeds in bringing effective education to villages that have had no school, and if Save the Children as an international NGO can successfully carry the initiating role while leaving ownership in local hands (villagers and the state), this could open up possibilities for extending village schooling in other parts of rural Africa. This would require extra resourcing, but if the method works, donors may be willing to provide it.

Getting going

With an understanding of the issues and a decision on methodology made, the Douentza village schools project moved fast:

Between January and September 1997 the schools were set up and opened:

- In January Save the Children set up a consultation process with government, donors, NGOs. and village communities around Douentza, and allocated staff roles. To keep the project cost effective, there was only one full-timer, an experienced community 'animateur' from the credit programme. No education specialist would be employed;

state education professionals would provide inputs on curricula and methodology.

- By March the plan was formulated, the project officer had gone on a month's training on education issues from a Malian NGO¹⁴, the participation of state education professionals had been negotiated, permission taken from provincial and local officials. A feasibility study was undertaken and two villages were identified that were keen to take part in the pilot phase, one in each of the main language groups in the Douentza area, Dogon and Fulfulde¹⁵.

- In April work began in the villages. School committees were formed and trained, teachers selected. The community agreed financial arrangements they thought they could sustain and principles for allocating school places. The community undertook to build two classrooms the first year, and a new one each year until the school had all six years of a primary school.

- In Douentza and Mopti education officials were sceptical that untrained village teachers could achieve an adequate level or that things would be ready to start in that school year. But the villagers were determined, and Save the Children staff were inspired by their enthusiasm to push the pace.

- By June two classrooms had been built in both villages.

- By September the teachers had received their first six weeks intensive training, and the first curriculum workshop had been held. Led by professionals from the state system, and attended by provincial and local officials, it made history by bringing in ordinary villagers (the teachers-to-be, school committee members and parents) to adapt the curriculum and materials to reflect village children's experience. Against the disbelief of the officials, and to the immense satisfaction of the villagers, the schools opened in October 1997.

By October 1998, both schools were still going strong:

- Extra classes had been built, there had been a second intake of children, more teachers trained, the curriculum further developed, now with the input of children. The schools had received a regular stream of interested visitors, who were impressed with the eagerness and confidence of the children and the pride of the school committees.

- In Douentza district, official attitudes had changed. The schools inspector had visited the schools and agreed to register them.

- A momentum had begun outside the project schools. Thirty new applications for

village community schools had been received by district education authorities¹⁶.

Save the Children staff themselves have balanced on a tightrope between excitement at what has been unleashed, and nervousness that it might not be sustained: *'It is very exciting and moving to witness the enthusiasm and commitment of the communities to their schools'*, says a discussion paper - which then goes on to list problem issues¹⁷. The following sections consider some of these issues, and whether the results have benefited children.

What kind of village?

It was assumed that the project could work only in a village with a strong desire for a school, and where there was sufficient cohesion to support a project requiring people to work together over a long period. There would need to be an uncontested site for the school, and people willing to build it. They would need people willing and capable of being trained as teachers. Most villages have a handful of adults with primary or even secondary education. To cover the full six years of primary school there would need to be at least six potential teachers, plus other adults willing to take on the responsibilities of a management committee. Finally, the parents would need to be willing to, and economically capable of, making contributions to support the teacher. In both the pilot villages, the community had already made an attempt to establish schools, unsupported by outsiders, and welcomed the chance to be part of the project: *'We have been waiting to get our own school since the first hours of independence.'*

Why work in two languages?

In the village of Koubwel Koundia the language is Dogon, in Debéré it is Fulfulde¹⁸. Working with two language groups doubles the complications of preparing curriculum materials and teacher training. But it has strong advantages:

- It avoids the danger of the project being seen to benefit one group, and offers good economies of scale: materials prepared for two project schools make possible an expansion of the methodology across villages in both groups.
- The project schools offer the first local examples of mother tongue teaching, and depending on the results officials will form opinions of whether this approach works. It is therefore important to be able to compare effectiveness across at least two languages, to show where certain outcomes may be specific to one language.

What does 'community participation' mean?

For the state, 'community participation' in schooling is usually seen as a cost-saving device: villagers provide free labour to build schools, and parents' contributions pay the teachers' salaries. The Douentza project envisages the role of the community in a more fundamental way:

'Schools should belong to the community, then they will last'

'Community involvement is fundamental and the spinal cord upon which the community school experience rests'

'Community management of a school improves access and quality of teaching whilst encouraging a demand for education'

Save the Children staff recognised that while the initiators of the project could set things up in a way that might encourage this, internal village dynamics would determine the future of the school. The outside facilitators would not wish to control those processes, but they would need to understand them.

Box 3: Language, culture and schooling

The Peulh, whose language is Fulfulde, span the Sahel, sharing a language and culture across the artificial borders that European colonisers drew. In the Douentza area they are agro-pastoralists, living in settled villages where they grow crops but also depending on animals. At certain seasons some of the villagers move the animals to new grazing areas ¹⁹.

The village of Debéré does not have a population large enough to support a school of the kind envisaged in the project. Soon the school will need to draw in children from nearby villages, but will they want to participate in a project they were not involved in from the start, especially since there are caste differences between the villages?

The Dogon are said to be among the oldest people in Mali. They live along a line of rocky hills and access to water is a constant problem, women and girls climb down what looks like a sheer rock face to get water in the stream below, and climb back up again with the weight of a large bucket of water balanced on their heads.

The village of Koubwel Koundia has exceptional cohesion, with a popular chief who is himself school-educated. Villagers have worked enthusiastically on each stage of the project, undeterred by their difficult terrain - the building materials for the school were stones that had to be broken with hand tools. But language is a complex issue.

There are at least 70 Dogon languages, many mutually unintelligible. Among them, the Torosso language has been selected by DNAFLA as the one best suited to be a common language among the Dogon, and therefore their first language of literacy.

What processes lead to 'community ownership'?

Ownership rests with those who commit the major effort and resources, and make the decisions. The villagers talk of 'our school', and feel the pride of ownership and control. They have built it, but more significantly, they take responsibility for running it.

The school management committee is elected by the whole village, selects the teacher, decides pupil intake, negotiates with the whole community what payment is to be made and how, and keeps accounts. A woman committee member ensures that girls get equal representation in the school, which may include negotiating with the girls' parents, and also that children with disabilities are included²⁰. There is a member responsible for 'education', monitoring what is taught and how; another for the school environment, another to sort out problems and areas of conflict.

'The management committees are the driving force behind the community approach' said an external review of the project. The Save the Children project officer has provided training in understanding the new roles, and has worked to sort out initial problems. The committees cannot work effectively without a consensus by the whole village:

'Social negotiation with all local actors consists in arriving at an agreement about commitments made, consensus being reached through awareness raising and animation activities: through village general assemblies, small groups, village personalities and opinion leaders'

Which children get school places?

The committee makes practical decisions, but within a framework of collaboration negotiated with Save the Children. Save the Children considers certain things non-negotiable: parents should contribute to paying teachers; girls should receive equal numbers of places as boys; children with disabilities should be included in school. Where these challenge traditional assumptions, an element of persuasion comes into the picture. Save the Children commissioned a group of musicians from Douentza to perform songs to try to encourage consensus on these issues. In villages where little happens to vary the pattern of every day, the arrival of the musical group draws the village together to listen.

People do not of course change their attitudes from hearing a song. A degree of

bargaining probably comes into the villagers' acceptance of these 'messages'. But the external review felt that villagers now genuinely supported most of the new ideas:

'A change of behaviour concerning the education of their children is already discernible amongst the villagers. In meetings they say, 'We regret the past.'

Haw far should NGO support go?

An external review praised the way the project had set up and supported the committees:

'The approach gives communities much more freedom in the management of their schools, leads communities to have confidence in themselves, encouraging them to commit themselves more strongly.'

But it echoed the requests of the committees for more training, particularly in those aspects which will become more relevant as the schools press to be more centrally included in the state system. They will need to conform to bureaucratic standards in relation to registering the ages of children, school registers, formally agreed school rules, minutes of meetings, etc. All of these require literacy skills, and raise the question of whether committee members (or at least some of them) need to be literate.

Every 'solution' creates its own dilemmas. If committee members must be literate, this limits the villagers' choice, cutting out people who might have better ability at managing the schools as social institutions. While the arguments for adult literacy provision are sound, the costs of the project increase with each extra input. This makes it less easy to see the project as a model for other villages.

The villagers are clear that the schools are 'theirs' but they know they could not have got this far alone, and are anxious to bind Save the Children in an ongoing relationship. Save the Children staff understand that, but try not to take on responsibilities which will undermine village ownership. Their refusal to get drawn in reflects no lack of desire to support villagers; on the contrary, it comes from a strong conviction that they would undermine the long term survival of the schools if they did²¹.

Box 4: Teachers' salaries when the rains fail

Each village community worked out what it considered feasible for parents to contribute to teachers' pay. The amounts agreed are far less than that paid by government for teachers, but they are rates the villages felt they could sustain and village teachers were willing to accept.

The calculation did not allow for the effects of a particularly bad drought, which struck the villages in the first year of the schools operation. Parents were having to leave the villages in search of wild fruit; how could they possibly pay for teachers? Perhaps just this year Save the Children should contribute to teachers' salaries? This would help in the short term, it would undermine the long term chances of the schools being viable.

At a meeting with Save the Children staff in November 1998, the committee said that tolerance and patience was needed by the teachers until things could be put on a better basis financially. The teachers reaffirmed their dedication:

We teach in order to teach our children, not for the remuneration. Our work is a patriotic commitment, and we cannot turn back.

But they have to support themselves. The way forward? A number of ideas emerged from the meeting:

- The committees persuaded all households, not just parents, to contribute to teachers' costs. This is a step forward for equity, for individual children will not be excluded because their parents cannot pay.
- The committees hope to extend this levy to the neighbouring villages whose children will be attending the school.

Over the longer term one important issue is who should pay the teachers? Save the Children in Mali is clear that it should not be the International NGO, but should villagers have to bear this cost directly when townspeople do not? ²² And what if particular parents cannot afford their contribution - do the children drop out? Does this kind of 'cost sharing' not undermine the central premise of the project, which is to give an equitable chance of education to the poorest? ²³ The logical future for the village schools is to become part of the state system, with the state paying the teachers. But is the state willing and able to take this on?

What role has the state system played in the pilot phase?

This is best seen in two parts. Specialists from the national level have:

- provided the curriculum framework
- developed the materials, incorporating inputs from curriculum workshops
- trained the teachers.

Provincial and local officials have:

- participated in events such as curriculum/training workshops
- registered the schools
- agreed to provide regular inspection and monitor standards.

An early task was to find individuals at a senior level in the education system who would be prepared to work with the project. Save the Children has had strong collaboration from the *Institut Pédagogic Nationale* and the literacy agency, DNAFLA, particularly through the participation of a senior IPN official, Bokary Sory Traoré, to whom much of the credit for the success of the use of the *Pédagogie Convergente* goes. But the decision to work with the *Pédagogie Convergente* also launched the project into controversy:

'We were confronted by the reticence that stems from the refusal of certain education officials to acknowledge the Pédagogie Convergente.'

The project hinged on a small number of educationalists who *'have a kind of monopoly'* of how to implement the new approach, and who expected higher rates for running workshops than Save the Children felt appropriate, since it was attempting to limit dependence on outsiders for a process which it was hoped would eventually be seen as the state's. But each side depended on the other, and compromises were reached. A senior official said: *I am committed to supporting the processes which the project has initiated, even if there aren't many resources.'*

Does the state take 'ownership'?

Because Save the Children has put in the resources and is the catalyst/facilitator of all developments, the project is perceived by the state system as 'Save the Children's'. Save the Children aims, however, for a gradual transference of ownership. Even though state officials have not initiated what is happening, the way is open to them at any point to take a larger role. Invitations are always given to events like workshops, and Save the

Children engages officials in ongoing dialogue about the project.

Responses are mixed. While the pilot schools have attracted attention, this may be threatening to education officials rather than encouraging. Though the new curriculum has approval from the national level, provincial education officials and local teachers do not necessarily approve of innovations. At the start of the project there was no real official support in the region for using local languages, and strong resistance to the idea that untrained villagers could become teachers, or that illiterate villagers might have anything to contribute to designing a curriculum. Yet only a year after the start of the project the schools inspector, who had been drawn somewhat reluctantly into visiting the schools and was definitely opposed to the use of local languages, ended up saying: ***'Save the Children is on the right track and we are therefore willing to collaborate in a process like this.'***

Finally, while officials' own status rises if their district or region can show improvements from new developments in their area, they are understandably nervous that they might be expected to pick up the bill. An education adviser in Douentza praised the progress of the Save the Children schools then added: ***'My only anxiety is the question of funding for the training of teachers in a context of poverty. I am not sure that the state would be able to play its role.'*** This is a fundamental issue affecting the future of the village schooling which is returned to in the concluding section.

Box 5: Changing attitudes of state officials

Committee members and teachers took part in the workshop to prepare the first year's curriculum, on the assumption that this would encourage schooling that takes account of the realities of children's experience.

Officials from IPN and DNAFLA were willing to go along with the experiment, but on the first day of the workshop the Regional Director of Education expressed grave doubts about the basic principles on which the project was based. This took Save the children staff by surprise, for there had been months of earlier negotiations during which they had been assured of the regional administration's support. Now Save the Children staff argued for going ahead - the schools had been built, the villagers were waiting, they had been assured by the educational experts at the national level that the plan was possible. They appealed to the DNAFLA facilitator to confirm this. In some discomfort at being thus challenged, he nevertheless repeated publicly the assurance he had given Save the Children:

'It is definitely possible for us to prepare in a week's workshop what is needed for the first term; after that we can take more time over the rest. For myself, I am confident in the future of these experimental

community schools'.

The workshop went ahead; the schools began in September with the first term's curriculum and materials ready. The schools were visited by many people, who found the teachers managing their role competently. Save the Children staff took courage and went one step further on the road to innovation. In the second curriculum workshop in December four children from Douentza's secondary school took part.

Can flexibility be retained?

While there are advantages in state ownership of the project there are also dangers. If the state takes more responsibility, would it be flexible enough to allow community management of schools and villager participation in adapting the curriculum? Will it insist that only qualified teachers can teach -thus cancelling the principle of relying on teachers from the village, and in effect closing the schools?

Do children learn things they need to know?

The point of setting up village schools was to equip children to face difficult life challenges. Are the schools likely to achieve this?

There is general agreement among both adults and children that what the children are learning is useful: numeracy, literacy, the confidence to express themselves. These skills are practised through a series of topics chosen to draw on the children's existing life experience and future needs. Villager participation in the curriculum workshops and village management of the schools have been the mechanisms for adapting what was already in the new curriculum more precisely to the context of these particular children, (for example, by including in the language lessons dialogues in which villagers prepare to move with the change in seasons to find grazing for the animals.) In these ways what the children are offered appears to be an improvement on what they would have got in a state school.

The principles of children's learning which are so clearly demonstrated in village attitudes to children's work are put on one side when children go to school. Once attitudes towards learning and school change there are opportunities for better learning. Parents could be brought into the classroom as resources for certain kinds of local knowledge. Children could be taken out more, to learn from the local environment. There are opportunities to make better links with other learning for life' activities that Save the Children is involved with, such as health and HIV education, credit management of accounts, etc²⁴.

Are the teachers effective?

At the start of the project the Regional Director of Education expressed a concern shared by many others (including senior Save the Children staff):

'I assure you that the teachers of these two villages are not capable of taking on the required knowledge and skills'

The teachers themselves appear to be undaunted: ***'Since we started teaching we have encountered no major difficulty. The children are very enthusiastic with what they are busy learning in the school'***.

Visitors to the schools (Malian and foreign, from Save the Children, other NGOs and state officials) consistently confirm that the children are eager, confident, and appear to be learning at a rate considered remarkable by Malian standards. It is too soon for rigorous testing, but ad hoc tests showed that after a year children were able to do things - read with understanding and apply calculations beyond simple memorisation²⁵ - which many third year pupils in state schools cannot.

How has it been possible for less well trained teachers to achieve what qualified teachers in state schools do not? The first factor is motivation; the second, the methods they have been trained to use.

What motivates village teachers?

Though village teachers are paid far less than state school teachers, their role is in many ways more satisfying. They gain status among villagers, praise and encouragement from outsiders who visit. They have cash income where before they may have had none, and they exchange work in agriculture for work which recognises their level of education. The training provides them with the stimulus of learning something new. Village teachers are chosen by the community and live side by side with the children and their parents, who will not be reticent in commenting if they think the teachers are neglecting their duties. Together with other villagers the teachers feel a responsibility not only to the children, but to themselves: ***'We cannot let ourselves fail as we have been chosen amongst many villages to host this project.'***

The state education adviser for Douentza acknowledged the experience of the village schools had reminded him that ***'University training is not the only criterion for performance of a teacher. It's also necessary to have high motivation and a love of ones profession.'*** Effective teaching relies on attitudes every bit as much as it does on skills.

There is a natural tendency for these positive factors to apply most strongly in the early

years of the project, when the challenge and novelty are greatest. Teaching has its repetitive sides; going through the curriculum with a group of first year pupils may be less exciting the fourth or fifth time. And there is the issue of pay. The initial aim in a project of this kind must be to pay teachers sufficient to enable them to teach. Once that level is reached, other questions will emerge. The more village teachers are brought into contact with the state teachers, the more it is likely to weigh on them that they are not paid adequately for what they do.

The experience of NGO-supported community school programmes elsewhere suggests that in the overall conditions of poverty and inequality it is virtually impossible to resolve these issues. Probably the most critical factor is the continuing availability of committed and sensitive community workers²⁶. The role of the community worker is commonly understood as redundant once things are set up. While the aim should be to reduce dependence, complete withdrawal of outside facilitators may result in the collapse of what has been built up. When new or difficult issues arise, if a community worker who has an established relationship with the villagers is available to facilitate, a great deal can be done to maintain morale, encourage realism about options, and thereby to ensure the effective functioning of schools.

Language is the critical factor. Children understand what they are learning, therefore they can learn²⁷. This link is obvious to a visiting educationalist, but is still a subject of controversy, and the advocates of local language teaching have a way to go to convince the sceptics. The testing point will come with the transition to French. And for this to be achieved effectively, teachers will need to be trained in new skills.

The *Pedagogie Convergente* lays stress not only on the fact that the language is familiar, but also on emotional factors - the need for encouragement, and an absence of fear - and cognitive processes²⁸. The village teachers have taken on board principles about teacher-child relationships and learning methods that contrast strongly with the kind of teaching they experienced as children. Teachers give lessons around a series of dialogues, and they know that if they take the children through all the dialogues, following all the steps, the children will learn to read.

As inexperienced teachers, they tend to carry out the dialogues to the letter, which carries the danger that this will become a system as rigid as the old one. It is, however, effective, and it has the advantage that it renders inexperience less of an issue.

The methods work - but why?

A reason for the teachers' high morale is that they have the reward of seeing children learn. In other words, their training has equipped them with methods that work. What elements of the *Pedagogie Convergente* have contributed to this?

The curriculum and teacher training processes have been led by state education professionals. In other words, the state itself has pioneered a methodology capable of turning unqualified villagers into effective teachers. Can the system make the other adaptations needed to back its own innovators, and let them use their competence to extend schools to other villages, and beyond that, to improving teaching for *all* Malian children?

Box 6: Learning to read through understanding

*The steps the teachers are trained to follow for each dialogue, using the **Pedagogie Convergente** method:*

- show the story through pictures
- say the dialogue several times, with the pictures, while the children listen, try to remember, but don't repeat
- choose children to take roles and act the dialogue
- show them the written dialogue, and read it, letting them repeat
- get them to write it.

In contrast to traditional methods, here the children:

- understand the spoken language, and the context is familiar
- don't just chant in a group, but take individual roles
- become confident with the spoken language before seeing it written
- start by reading whole, meaningful sentences, not with the alphabet
- only write things they already can read.

Imagining, as a tool for learning with understanding:

There is one step that helps children and teachers remember that the important thing is what is going on in the child's mind, not what the teacher can see or hear: the first time children get the chance to take roles, they do so silently, miming the actions. They think the words but don't say them aloud. While they seem to be doing less, their minds are actually more engaged, as they actively imagine the whole scene. When they have done this they get a turn to act with words¹.

What has been learnt?

What have we learnt from this experience about an appropriate role for an International NGO in facilitating collaborative state-community provision in rural African contexts?

Testing a methodology

It has been shown that:

- ***Villagers*** will make considerable efforts to set up schools in their own villages, are flexible in taking on new ideas, and capable of managing their schools, given adequate support and training.
- ***Unqualified village teachers*** can do an effective job, provided they are given appropriate training, a basic salary, and a sense of being valued.
- ***Children*** in such schools do learn.

In terms of links with the state system:

- ***Professionals*** from the state system have made the main contribution towards the success of the schools in terms of curriculum and methodology.
- ***Education officials*** at provincial and local level were reticent about the innovations, but through being involved at all stages have been persuaded that the approach is viable.
- ***The NGO*** (in a project managed by local Malian staff) played a critical role in facilitating both the village processes and recognition by the state system. Its commitment to the concept of local ownership (by both villagers and the state) has been a defining factor.

What are the unresolved issues?

- ***The village:*** The general level of poverty may make it impossible for villagers to continue paying teachers enough, and it seems unlikely that the state will take on this responsibility without donor funding.

- ***Linking into the state system:*** The project will need to run six years before it will be possible to test the long term effectiveness of the ***Pedagogie Convergente*** in bringing village children to the level of French required to go to secondary school.
- ***The ongoing NGO contribution:*** Each stage of the developing project will continue to require support (e.g. for teaching training and curriculum development for each new set of teachers and as children move to the next class). This is a necessary commitment to bring one cycle to completion. But there are dilemmas about the degree of continuing involvement. It would be possible to make a significant difference to the quality and relevance of the schooling through input on issues of children's participation, links between school and life, etc, but too much involvement may reinforce dependence on outsiders.

Costs and sustainability

What costs would the state incur if it took more responsibility for supporting community schools?²⁹ There are generic developmental activities, for instance developing local language curricula and materials, which in the pilot phase have been funded by Save the Children these are costly but once done will serve a wide range of schools for years to come, so it is possible to imagine them being absorbed by the state system with short term donor support.

There is the cost of school buildings. The reliance on local materials and labour makes it possible to envisage low-cost expansion. Project staff have tried to negotiate a relaxation of official standards for buildings. This is a critical issue for the expansion of the village school model, since village communities cannot meet official criteria without considerable external funding.³⁰

By keeping the project small enough in the pilot phase to observe the effects of different inputs, it is now possible to be specific about what is critical. Experience shows that facilitating costs should not be skimmed (e.g. the salaries of the project staff, essential during the initiating period and in a less intense form for ongoing support to village management committees as they come to terms with their role).

All the costs so far relate to setting up, equipping and managing schools. The key question still is what happens inside them, and maintaining standards in the long run will depend on schools being brought into the framework of state provision.

The key roles for the state system revolve around the actual teaching: teacher qualifications, teacher training, and paying the teachers. The project has shown that

while lack of resources is indeed a major issue, inflexibility is at least an equal problem. With tactful handling it is possible to make progress towards more flexible arrangements. The main lesson of the project is that the really essential costs are paying those adults who make the education process happen for children. The state needs to reconsider:

- which adults?
- what roles?
- being paid how much?

If the state insists the only teachers it employs are fully qualified, the costs of increasing access in rural areas will remain prohibitive. Accepting a second tier of village teachers will spread whatever additional funding can be obtained much further. For village teachers even a modest state salary would be an improvement on their present state, offering a security that villagers caught in the trap of poverty cannot guarantee. The salaries of village facilitators (who in turn activate many villagers who work voluntarily) is considerably more cost-effective than paying bureaucratic officials.

The NGO role - where next?

What role does Save the Children envisage it can play in encouraging a wider application of the lessons of the pilot project? The next stages are already being planned:

- ***In Douentza cercle***, Save the Children will seek to put the collaborative arrangement between the state and communities on a more formalised footing, and seek donor funding to expand the project to more villages.
- ***In Mopti region***, Save the Children will build on the reputation which its practical experience has given it to facilitate discussions between the state system, donors, and other NGOs on how to link community schools more closely with the state system.
- ***Nationally*** education policy is set to change in Mali. With the support of major donors, the Ministry of Education has developed a new framework for basic education. PRODEC, in which the ***Pédagogie Convergente*** is likely to receive stronger backing. Save the Children is now well-placed to contribute to these developments, particularly on how the new approaches can be made accessible in the Sahel. Plans are being discussed for a workshop bringing together national, regional and district levels of government with NGOs and agencies with experience of community schools, to discuss how lessons from these experiments can

be built into the government's national education plan.

- *Aross Africa*, there is a need to draw together related experiences of NGOs, both local and international, who have attempted to cut through the barriers to schooling for children in remote rural areas.

Editors' Conclusions

- The education system in this rural district combined many of the worst aspects of poor quality education in poor communities: schools that are too distant, irrelevant to rural life, organised in a rigid system unable to adapt to local needs, and teaching in a language the children do not understand.
- Despite teachers' lack of formal qualifications, the community schools have been successful through the exceptional motivation of the whole community, the use of local languages, short training courses equipping teachers with techniques for child-centred teaching, and providing a structure for real community participation.
- There is a tension between the need to involve the state in community schools (to build sustainability and achieve wider impact), and the possibility that further involvement by the centralised state will threaten community management of the schools and villager participation in adapting the curriculum.
- As in other contexts, the issue of teachers' pay is a fundamental threat to the sustainability of the programme. Rigid implementation of cost-sharing by parents would threaten the principle of schools accessible to all, and teachers may not be willing in the long term to accept considerably lower pay than their counterparts in the state system.
- From the outset, the aim was to achieve a wider impact through developing a model programme that could challenge the rigidity and unresponsiveness of the state education system. Through the demonstrable success of the community schools, and through seeking to link with government at different levels throughout the early stages, Save the Children is now well placed to contribute to the development of the government's new national education plan.

Notes

¹ For school attendance figures see Zoumana Koné, 1998. 'SCF/UK's experience in education', external consultant case study commissioned by Save the Children.

² Tod, B, July 1998. 'Out of the frying pan into...: The experience of SCF(UK) Mali with community primary schools', Internal report, Save the Children

³ Koné 1998

⁴ Interviews with villagers, Molteno, M, 1996. 'SCF Mali: A possible education programme?' Internal report, Save the Children

⁵ Issa Sidibé, 1998. 'Des bras valides pour demain? Le travail des enfants au Mali'. Study jointly commissioned by Save the Children UK, US, Sweden and Canada. It included interviews with 600 children and their parents. All citations in this section are from this study.

⁶ Molteno 1996

⁷ Koné 1998, p.19, quoting a report from the Bandiagara Primary Education Inspector, and p.8.

⁸ These problems are widespread in rural Africa. See other case studies from Africa, and Obura, A, 1994, assessment for a possible education programme in Zanzibar. Internal report, Save the Children

⁹ For equivalent developments in the neighbouring Sahel state of Burkina Faso, see Boulaye Lallou, 'Burkina Faso: language reform is no simple matter', in 'UNESCO Sources', Sept. 1998

¹⁰ Save the Children staff had themselves experienced the effectiveness of mother tongue literacy teaching in adult literacy classes as part of a credit programme.

¹¹ This has been the experience of a major community schools project run by SCF (US) in southern Mali.

¹² Source: Bakary Sogoba, who now works for SCF (UK) but previously worked for an NGO closely associated with World Education, and has an overview of NGO activity in general through involvement in the Groupe Pivot Education de Base.

¹³ See the Ethiopia case study for more on issues of decentralisation.

¹⁴ Boubacar Bocoum, 1997. Report of training of facilitator by Partenaires du Developpement Integre, Mali. Internal report, Save the Children

¹⁵ Mamadou Diallo, Bakary Sogoba, 1997. 'Resultat d'etude de milieu et de faisibilite concernant la création d'écoles communautaires dans le cercle de Douentza'. Internal report, Save the Children

¹⁶ Tod, B, Oct 1998. 'Education case study: further thoughts on sustainability and wider impact'. Internal report, Save the Children

¹⁷ Tod, July 1998

¹⁸ Both villages have been designated 'county towns' in the new moves to decentralise the Malian administrative system. They will be well placed to act as centres for surrounding villages.

¹⁹ Quotations in this section are all from Koné 1998

²⁰ A Malian NGO that works on disability issues, ADD, was commissioned to do a survey of the children with disabilities in the villages, as a basis for ensuring that they are included.

²¹ There is still controversy on how to handle this. The external review recommended a food for work programme for teachers.

²² At a francophone regional meeting in Bamako on community basic education in 1997, this was the main issue raised by participants. See Tod, July 1998

²³ See Penrose, P, 1998. Cost sharing in education, Education Research Paper no. 27, Department for International Development; also Felicity Hill, Cost Sharing, paper commissioned for this research project

²⁴ Save the Children's experience of school support activities in the Caribbean offer good examples. See McIvor, C (ed)1999. The earth in our hands: children and environmental change in the Caribbean, Save the Children

²⁵ Ad hoc tests by Marion Molteno and Bakary Sogoba in November 1998

²⁶ See the India case study. The Indian NGO, SIDH, offers an example with an impressive record of tackling such issues over a ten year period.

²⁷ The situation in the Peulh school is simpler to draw conclusions from than in the Dogon school, because of the many Dogon languages

²⁸ Koné, 1998

²⁹ See Tod Oct 1998 for a summary analysis of project costs, and implications for expansion.

³⁰ Compare the experience of the international NGO, World Education, which has not challenged official building standards. Donor funding is recruited for the first year to build 3 classrooms in each community (at a cost of approximately £26,000). Thereafter it is up to communities to find their own external funding to continue construction of subsequent classrooms. World Education offers skills and training support to those who succeed in doing so. Predicatably, many do not. (Source, Bakary Sogoba.)

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SECTION III. CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT

[Giving a meaning to life - Palestinian children in refugee camps - A case study from Lebanon](#)

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[The aftermath of conflict - New tasks with few resources - A case study from Mozambique](#)

The problem:

- The effects of conflict on children and schooling
- The range of conflict-related situations

The approach:

- The case for international intervention
- The potential of education to foster resilience
- What structures are there to work with?
- The Lebanon study
- The Liberia study
- The Mozambique study

Issues:

- Problems of international intervention
- What is 'sustainable' in the context of conflict?
- Relevance, active learning, and the power of education

THE PROBLEM

The effects of conflict on children and schooling

That children (like all people) are damaged by war is obvious. We are considering here one specific aspect of this: the interrelation between the damage caused by conflict and the role of education in children's lives.

We can see this as operating on several different levels which continually inter-relate:

- At the most personal level is the damage done to children by their direct experience of war or violence - against themselves, against the adults who care for them, perhaps resulting in the traumatic loss of those closest to them.
- Secondly, there is the damage done to the society around them, through which their ability to learn and develop is mediated. The social groups and ways of daily life around children provide them with their security and a sense of their place in the world. When that crumbles around them, there is no longer anything that can be relied on, and children's normal development is disrupted -including the ability to concentrate, learn, explore, express themselves, to trust adults, all of which are critical to an educational process. This loss of all familiar things is even more dramatic for children who are violently displaced and have to come to terms with life on a completely new (and usually much degraded) basis elsewhere.
- Finally, there is the disruption to educational opportunities from the fact that conflict destroys schools and school systems as well as people.

Even where schools remain operating through wartime, we should expect that conflict damages children's ability to respond to whatever educational experience is offered them. But children (like all people) also have extraordinary resilience. A critical issue of educational provision in such situations is how to strengthen that resilience.

The range of conflict-related situations

While the nature of the damage caused by conflict is fundamentally similar everywhere, the potential for external support to minimise or repair that damage varies widely according to context. The issues are complex, and more than in any other section of this book it is important to state that the case studies included here cannot be seen as representative. They were selected from many potential cases, each taking a substantially different form. To see them in perspective it may therefore be helpful to locate these studies against a wider analysis.

Save the Children's experience in humanitarian emergencies over many decades suggests three broad groupings of conflict contexts in which it may be appropriate for international agencies to attempt to support education. [Brackets give examples of countries where Save the Children has supported education programmes.]

In situations where conflict and its effects are long-term:

- with refugees trapped for decades by unresolved political issues [Tibetans in India, Palestinians in Lebanon]
- with minorities in supposedly 'safe' zones, but with continuing insecurity [northern Iraq]
- in societies not officially at war but with high levels of ongoing violence [South Africa, Colombia, Peru, Northern Ireland]

In current or recurrent conflicts:

- during civil war [Afghanistan, southern Sudan, Sri Lanka]
- in cross border conflicts [Eritrea]
- with children internally displaced [northern Sudan, West Bank/Gaza]
- with children in short term camps outside the country of origin [Rwandans in Tanzania]
- with children at the front edge of conflict [ex child soldiers in Liberia]

In the immediate post-conflict years:

- where there is no government [Somalia]
- with an interim UN presence [Kosovo]
- with a new authority, not internationally recognised [Somaliland]
- with government reasserting control over 'rebel' areas, but unlikely to tackle the needs of conflict-affected children [Tajikistan]
- with a recognised but fragile government structure, unlikely to have the capacity to reconstruct education systems unaided [Ethiopia, Mozambique]

The studies published here include one from each group: Lebanon, for children affected by long-drawn out conflict; Liberia, for children caught up in current conflict; Mozambique, as an example of support to rebuild schooling after civil conflict.

THE APPROACH

The case for international intervention The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the primary role of parents and communities to care for children but puts the onus on states to provide what parents cannot. Civil conflict creates the worst possible scenario in that the primary carers of children are themselves under immense stress, and the conflict has caused the breakdown (partial or complete) of state systems of service delivery.

The Convention envisages that international support be used to support states where they cannot ensure children's rights without external assistance. Conflict situations again are an extreme version of this incapacity. The case for international support is clear. The rationale for putting education high on the list for international support is not only that it is a right in itself, which in times of conflict is destroyed, but because of the unique potential of education to foster children's resilience.

The issue, however, is not simply the need, but what can be done about it with outside support. And this raises many problems.

The potential of education to foster resilience

Consider the threefold types of damage discussed above (to the child personally, to the society around the child, and to the school system):

- Damage at a personal level is perhaps the easiest to grasp, but there is considerable dispute as to what role Outside agencies can or should play in helping children through this. One strand of international response has been to tackle the problems individualistically, for instance assessing the numbers of children suffering from medically recognised levels of trauma, and attempting to provide therapeutic supports. This 'trauma' model has evoked considerable criticism. One reason is that scale makes it impractical - no one denies that civil war is traumatising, but potentially the entire population can be designated as in some degree trauma affected. Perhaps more fundamental, the individualism of western therapeutic responses sits poorly in many cultures, in which it is far from normal to encourage children to talk about their anxieties. While individual children may respond well at the moment of receiving such support, they are unlikely to receive ongoing support from adults in their

community to carry that through, and the end result may be more damaging than therapeutic.

- The programme approaches adopted in these case studies, as in all Save the Children programmes in conflict, look for more collective ways to respond. That is, they tackle the problem at the level of society. The emotional and developmental damage to children is still the central concern but the form of support is via sensitive collective educational processes. In one case (Lebanon) the supports were mediated through many different groups in the society, strengthening the adults as well as the children; this in turn creates a better basis for children to find their own ways to build positively. In another case (Liberia) where the children had no community, the approach was to create safe 'spaces' (social as much as physical) which could to some extent substitute for the loss of a secure wider society. The aim here is that children eventually go out from this protected environment back into the disrupted world in which they will have to survive longer term. ¹

- In the third case (Mozambique) the focus is the damage done to the school system - and therefore to the children, since for every year that this damage is left unrepaired, children suffer loss of educational opportunity.

There are powerful arguments for supporting appropriate kinds of schooling in times of conflict - or in the absence of schools, of providing collective educational experiences through some other mechanism:

- In times of social disruption simply the act of going to school daily has a normalising effect.
- Where schools, however makeshift or minimally equipped, are responsive to the children's situation, they can provide a space where children can be children and fulfil their needs for play, recreation and personal development.
- The fact that schools exist offers some hope to communities that are insecure about their future, and therefore also about the prospects for their children.
- Sensitive education has a proven role in improving the psychological well-being of children and equipping them to better deal with their immediate situation.

- Provision of effective schooling in times of conflict can prevent whole generations from missing out on schooling and developing skills on which future recovery and development will depend. Missing a critical few years loses ground that cannot be recovered.

What structures are there to work with?

What practical options are open to an international agency working on education in conflict affected contexts? A determining factor is the degree to which local structures (societal and governmental) exist which can be supported to provide schools or other collective educational experiences; and where such structures exist, how well adapted they are to address the special problems created by conflict.

The three cases included here reflect different points on this spectrum:

- At one extreme, in Liberia there was an absence of any structured authority that could provide educational support for a group of youth in urgent need of it. Save the Children therefore took direct action to provide it.
- In Lebanon a UN agency runs schools for Palestinians but in a rigid system that does nothing to help children respond to their actual situation. Save the Children therefore supported a range of groups and activities outside the school system.²
- In Mozambique there is a state-run education system but facing problems that combine classic underdevelopment (Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the world) with the multiple-damage of conflict. The strategic choice here was to support government to become as effective a school provider as possible in the circumstances.

The Lebanon study

The Lebanon case describes a long term set of support activities with Palestinian children. For the past 50 years, Palestinians have lived as stateless refugees in a generally hostile host country, exposed to on-going violence, and with little hope of a lasting political solution. Work in education grew out of initial projects to support shelter and sanitation, and a concern for children orphaned or otherwise damaged by conflict and displacement.

The long-term nature of the camp situation evoked a long term response. Save the Children started work in the camps as early as 1948, with more fully developed work in education evolving over the last two decades. This has allowed Save the Children to develop close and trusting relationships with communities and build up genuine community capacity to develop and implement relevant education programmes. What started as a pre-school programme to meet a gap in UN school provision evolved into a broader range of activities with children and youth, including school clubs and summer camps. The central concern with the children's 'welfare led to experimentation with active learning, child-focused approaches that were extremely innovative in that context.

The programme was based on a broad partnership approach, promoting links between parents and programmes as well as between refugee communities and other providers (UN and NGOs). These partnerships have been a conduit for enabling communities to take some control over their children's educational development and thus achieve a higher degree of self-realisation within the confines of camp life.

The Liberia study

In contrast, the Liberia case describes a short term project with a group of demobilised child soldiers -a group suffering extreme damage, and whose reintegration into society is a necessary aspect of building towards peace.

The Liberia experience highlights an important feature of programming in difficult, unstable circumstances: the need to be flexible and let activities evolve responsively. The education work grew out of what was essentially a family tracing programme, which took in ex child soldiers under the national programme of demobilisation. This led to the creation of a transit centre to house and feed the boys and increasingly provide some structure to their lives through recreation, constructive play and, over time, basic education inputs. What had started as a temporary expedient evolved into a programme of basic and “catch up” education once it became clear that reunification could take months for some ex-combatants.

The child soldier programme is the only case included here of direct intervention to provide for a particular group of children, rather than working to support partners. Partly this was practicality, partly political necessity: for security reasons it was imperative for Save the Children to be seen as politically neutral and not to support any faction. In other ways the political space creates opportunities. With the collapse and uncertainty of Liberian government structures, international NGOs became a major channel of large, bilateral donor inputs such as food aid, increasing their domain of influence. Save the Children was able to use its position to gain leverage to advocate on politically sensitive issues such as issues of child protection and child rights.

The progressive involvement of community children in the “catch up” education presented new issues. In its later phase Save the Children staff attempted to shift towards a longer term developmental approach, exploring ways of working with communities and co-operating with Ministry of Education officials on accelerated learning issues.

The Mozambique study

The study from Mozambique describes an attempt to support government to rebuild schools and the school system, and increasingly to encourage them to involve communities in this, against a background of continuing tension after a civil war. It provides an example of the evolution of Save the Children's approach. The starting point was a strong commitment to supporting government provision, but the multiple difficulties created by the legacy of conflict have highlighted the limitations this approach brings with it. Senior Save the Children staff coming into the programme during the last couple of years have questioned the assumptions on which earlier activities were based; they have looked for ways to involve communities more closely and to bring a stronger child focus into what was essentially an institution-building approach. While some improvements have been brought about, there is now a sense that more can be achieved through a broader concept of the INGO role.

ISSUES

Problems of international intervention

Despite the overwhelming case for international agency support in this field, the record of provision is still very patchy. Civil war creates the most difficult environment in which to support sustainable civil actions. Buildings may be destroyed, the people who might use them may have to flee, the authorities that might in times of peace be expected to manage them now have urgent agendas in which running schools hardly features; and they may in fact be incapable of governing in the normal sense because their legitimacy as a government is under threat, or there are rival authorities, or none.

There are also specific problems relating to the functioning of international agencies. Where a UN presence administers the area, this international authority is usually reluctant to (or has no mandate or funding to) do anything that is not short term. International NGOs operate in emergencies under the umbrella of the UN authorities, and work under essentially similar constraints. They may not be able to raise funding since donors conventionally exclude education from the list of 'immediate needs' in times of crisis. In other situations funding is not the issue (e.g. in refugee contexts where NGOs may be sub-contracted by UNHCR to manage aspects of temporary service provision) but the framework for carrying out development work is often

inadequate. A major problem is poorly co-ordinated responses. Humanitarian emergencies attract a lot of smaller agencies, some newly set up in response to that particular crisis. While their motives are usually admirable they may have no working experience in that part of the world, rely heavily on expatriates with little knowledge of the local situation, and as organisations may have little experience of even the more basic 'good practice' principles for development agencies. There are also some groups who take advantage of the anarchic situation of an emergency to push their own agendas (for example, to gain recruits to their religion.) The more experienced agencies often spend much of their effort in working to get more co-ordinated approaches.

Within each of the more established organisations there are usually clearly worked out principles of emergency response. But there is a need for internationally agreed codes of conduct to govern the interventions of *all* agencies in such situations, and to ensure compliance with minimum standards. An inter-agency collaboration called the SPHERE project has begun to lay down such minimum standards for areas such as nutrition, health, and water services during humanitarian emergencies. Equivalent agreed standards are urgently needed in relation to education.

What is 'sustainable' in the context of conflict?

On the issue of sustainability the studies present very different approaches. The Mozambique study interprets sustainability in conventional terms, seeking to support the state and holding back from pushing on issues which it considers are the state's role to decide - with consequent limitations in what it could achieve for children. In the Liberia case the classic emergency situation applied, and long-term sustainability was not seen as an issue because of the intended one off nature of the input.

The Lebanon study presents perhaps the most challenging view. It sees sustainability not in institutional terms but in terms of impact on people, what they will carry with them through life. It also highlights both the importance and the dilemmas of long-term commitment to conflict-affected communities. No-one predicted that a political solution would take more than fifty years: a sustained input to the same communities on the same programmes is not normal practice because of the danger of creating both human and financial dependency. Save the Children's decision to provide ongoing support to Palestinian refugees was taken to reflect an important message of commitment and solidarity to these communities and has been a key factor in developing their trust and respect and innovative education programmes. But neither donors nor other international NGOs are willing to commit resources for an extensive period. The UN itself is beset with financial problems with the usual knock-on effects of falling programme quality.

Relevance, active learning, and the power of education

The extreme nature of the problems facing children affected by conflict pushes high on the agenda questions of relevance and the need for active learning. In the Lebanon and Liberia cases it was evident early on to those working on the programme that for children whose needs were so obvious a conventional school response would be inadequate. In the Mozambique case this realisation came later, through frustration at how little benefit children were receiving from the schools which the programme had help to rebuild. Ironically, the greatest strides on relevance and methodology were possible in what are by most standards the worst situations, but where there was least possibility or need to engage with an established school system. The result was that adults managing these programmes responded directly to their evolving understanding of children's needs.

Perhaps the most fundamental lesson to derive from the studies is not so much about the specifics achieved in each case, or the limitations they display, but about the conviction which underpins those who are involved. The belief that education holds the key to children's future is common in deprived communities but is particularly strong among refugees and others affected by conflict. All those involved in these programmes believed strongly in the potential of education to equip children and communities with life skills, and that this could help them deal better with the difficulties and uncertainties of their situation. Education remains one of the few opportunities available to Palestinian children in the camps in spite of the creeping realism about its limitations. Constructive play, interactive learning, safe environment and familiarisation with the Palestinian culture, helped tackle the psychological effects of conflict on children and build up their self esteem and capacity to learn. Among the former child soldiers education was the vehicle for inculcating a belief in a viable alternative to organised violence, creating an environment in which they were able to re-establish trusting relationships, develop self-confidence and the capacity to learn. Encouraging community children and former child soldiers to learn together significantly improved relations between the centres and wider community as well as between individuals, providing a starting point for reconciliation.

Notes

¹ See Patrick Bracken and Celia Petty, *Rethinking the trauma of war*, Save the Children 1998

² In other cases Save the Children programmes have worked directly with school systems to sensitize teachers to the role they can play in this. See two handbooks by Naomi Richman, *Helping children in difficult circumstances*, and *Communicating with children: helping children in distress*, Save the Children, 1991 and 1993

³ A project by Save the Children and other international NGOs in Afghanistan and Sri

Lanka has produced a 'Minimum requirements package' for children in conflict, listing the areas that ideally would be incorporated in an educational response. See Shon Campbell, *Supporting basic education during conflict*, and Emmanuelle Abrioux (ed) *Education in Conflict: a 'Minimum Requirements Package'*; internal reports, Save the Children

Giving a meaning to life - Palestinian children in refugee camps - A case study from Lebanon



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What are the problems for children?

The Palestinians in Lebanon

During the Arab-Israeli war which culminated in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, some 725,000 Palestinian Arabs fled to Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, The West Bank

and Gaza Strip.¹ The refugees were effectively prevented from returning to their homes by the Jewish Israeli authorities, despite the affirmation by the United Nations General Assembly of their inviolable right to return. In Lebanon, Palestinian refugees were classified as neither foreigners nor nationals and were registered in refugee camps which are still administered by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East).

Box 1: Children's voices from the camps

'My only hope in life is to visit my homeland, Palestine, even if only once to breathe in its scent and keep it in my memory so I shall never forget it'

Maysa Salloum, aged 13

'My life in exile is hard. I have no nationality. I would like to go back to my country, to feel its warmth and affection'

Shahnaz, aged 14

'It is my right to live in safety. They made us get used to being refugees.'

Milad Abou Kharroub, aged 17

Fifty years on, over 356,000 refugees remain in Lebanon, representing over 11% of the total population of Lebanon, with over 194,000 living in 12 refugee camps, and over 162,000 living outside the camps. They continue to experience the usual economic and social hardships associated with living in refugee camps, exacerbated by severe travel and employment restrictions. In addition, Palestinian refugees have suffered directly from the ongoing conflicts in the region. These have included Israeli attacks and invasions, the Lebanese civil war, and factional in-fighting within the Palestinian community. There is deeply entrenched mistrust for the Palestinian refugees on the part of the host country which is struggling to rebuild its communities, torn apart by decades of civil war and still in conflict.

The refugee community in Lebanon clings to a fierce sense of national identity and claims the right to return to their homes in Palestine, while the Lebanese government remains reluctant to extend Lebanese citizenship to Palestinians. The Palestinian-Israeli peace process which has been underway since 1993, has largely ignored the plight of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and there is a sense that they have been abandoned by the Palestinian political leaders in the newly autonomous West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians in Lebanon now find themselves in limbo: isolated, stateless and with no

sense of how, when or by whom their situation may be resolved.

Box 2: Key events

- 1948** Creation of Israel, displacement of 725,000 Palestinian refugees, 125,600 to Lebanon
 - 1950** UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) established to provide emergency assistance to Palestinian refugees
 - 1967** War. West Bank and Gaza Strip become Occupied Territories and more Palestinians become refugees in neighbouring Arab countries
 - 1975 - 91** Lebanese Civil War
 - 1982** War. Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Massacres in Palestinian refugee camps
 - 1986 - 7** The camp wars between Lebanese and Palestinian militias. Displacement and massacres - more widows and orphans
 - 1991** The Gulf War: expulsion of Palestinians from Gulf States back into the camps in Lebanon. Unemployment and reduction in funding from Arab States
 - 1993** Madrid and Oslo Peace Accord
 - 1995** Establishment of Palestinian National Authority and autonomy in West bank and Gaza Strip. Unclear status for Palestinians in Lebanon and reduction of PLO services in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon
- Marginalisation of Palestinians in Lebanon and other Arab countries. New re-entry visa restrictions for Palestinians to return to Lebanon
- 1996** Israeli attacks in South Lebanon. Displacement from villages. Qana massacre: air attack on UN Peace keeping base killing and wounding sheltering women and children
 - 1998** Wye River peace accords; situation and future of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remains unresolved

Impact of conflict on Palestinian children

As with most conflict situations, it is children who are most vulnerable to hardship and insecurity. In the case of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the long term nature of the conflict has meant that successive generations of children have suffered the effects of displacement and war, growing up in siege conditions with little hope of return to a homeland which is no longer on the international map.

Direct impact of violence on children:

- physical damage as a result of the fighting

- emotional damage as a result of both external attack, factional fighting and political violence in the camps
- loss of parents or relatives
- sudden displacement or the loss of the family home
- family breakdown
- limited access to and disruption of basic services, including health and education
- constant threat of external attack or renewed conflict
- refugee camps overcrowded, leaving no safe place for children to play

Indirect impact on children - economic situation of families:

- economic stagnation and inflation in Lebanon due to the civil war
- withdrawal of PLO economic support to camps in Lebanon
- lack of employment opportunities compounded by travel restrictions and restrictions on the kind of jobs open to Palestinians in Lebanon
- reduction in remittances to camp families
- increase in child labour to supplement the family income and increase in girls domestic duties as women seek paid work opportunities
- reduced income opportunities and practical child care options for female headed-households

Impact on children's individual development:

In addition to these practical problems, children grow up in a climate of relentless uncertainty and fear due not only to conflict itself, but also to tensions within the family as insecurity, frustration and economic pressures take their toll. The very fact of being born into exile, and the experience of growing up stateless as a second-class citizen in Lebanon and within a community which is isolated politically, socially and physically,

challenges the child's sense of identity and self-esteem.

'Individual children react in different ways including withdrawal symptoms, aggression, guilt feelings and depression. Bed wetting, poor appetites, broken sleep patterns, nightmares and clinging to carers for security affect the children's normal development and challenge adults' abilities to reassure and deal consistently with the emotional demands of their children. Yet many children show remarkable resilience even to the long term effects.' Julia Gilkes, Save the Children Middle East Early Childhood Development Advisor

UNRWA schools

All formal primary and secondary education for Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon is provided by UNRWA, The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East:

UNRWA's role in the region:

- UNRWA has been providing education, health, relief and social services to registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1950
- the mandate of the agency is based on a resolution adopted by the UN in 1949 and has been renewed repeatedly pending a solution to the Palestinian question
- the current, seventeenth mandate extends to 30 June 1999
- in May 1996 UNRWA headquarters were relocated from Vienna to Gaza
- UNRWA's largest programme is education, taking 47% of the total budget in 1997

UNRWA's education programme in Lebanon:

- UNRWA schools in Lebanon follow the Lebanese curriculum and use a traditional, formal academic approach, with little or no provision made for sport, physical exercise, creative, cultural or self expressive activities.
- While UNRWA's education programme in Lebanon is headed by

international staff, all teachers in UNRWA schools are from the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon.

- 37, 969 pupils are enrolled in 72 UNRWA elementary/preparatory schools and in 1 secondary school, representing approximately 50% of all Palestinian children of school age registered with UNRWA in Lebanon
- classes are large (50 - 60 pupils in each class)
- almost 50% of pupils are girls

UNRWA is mandated to provide education for all Palestinian refugee children from the age of 6, but the reality is that existing school provision does not reach the whole population. Even where children have access to schools, resources are scarce, classes are overcrowded and teachers are underpaid and demoralised. Although primary school was made compulsory in 1991, coverage of schools is still inadequate. In an attempt to respond to this, many UNRWA schools now operate a shift system, providing classes in the morning and afternoon. In addition to lack of resources, a major reason for children's absence from school are the pressing economic needs which oblige many children to work in order to supplement the family income, or take responsibility for domestic tasks including child care while mothers are working:

'My classmate had to leave school to work in a mechanics workshop to help his family earn enough to live' Maysa Salloum, aged 13

Teachers in UNRWA schools operate under a great deal of pressure, with limited resources, low pay and large classes (up to 50 or 60 children in one class) which prevent teachers from building one to one relationships with individual pupils. There is even less contact with parents who are not encouraged to be involved in school activities: children are 'handed over' to the school and expected to come home 'educated.' Because of this lack of communication between teachers, pupils and parents, teachers often have little understanding of the external pressures on individual children which can make it difficult or impossible for them to benefit from the education on offer in schools. In a context where school is seen as an institution separate from the rest of children's lives, still less attention can be paid by teachers and UNRWA education officials to the many factors which prevent children from taking up educational opportunities even where they are available.

The way forward for formal education in the camps, both in terms of provision and of improving quality, is bound up with the uncertainty of the present and future status of Palestinians in Lebanon since the start of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It is not clear how many Palestinians will eventually receive Lebanese citizenship or what will

become of those who do not. The future of the UNRWA schools is unclear: some may be integrated into the existing Lebanese system, though the criteria, process and timeframe for this can only be guessed at this stage. The Lebanese educational system is currently undergoing a process of reform with the introduction of a wider syllabus and more child centred teaching approaches. It is not yet clear to what extent the UNRWA schools will follow this reform process, particularly given the resource implications for training and materials. Decisions on making such an investment in the future of education provision in UNRWA schools is bound up with pending decisions about the wider future of the Palestinian community in Lebanon. In the current climate of uncertainty it seems likely that educational reform for UNRWA schools will remain 'on hold.'

Shifting attitudes of Palestinians to education

Until recently, education was seen by many Palestinians in diaspora as an insurance against political instability - a tool you can always carry with you no matter what happens. Education has also been seen as a passport to well paid jobs in other countries of the Middle East and beyond and many families have survived on the remittances sent home from relatives working abroad. In recent years, this view of the usefulness of a formal education has been challenged. In the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, in reprisal for Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein, many Palestinians working in other Arab countries of the Middle East were dismissed and sent home to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the camps in Lebanon. Employment opportunities for Palestinians in the region and within Lebanon are becoming increasingly restricted. Within the camps, the PLO itself also undermined the traditional view of education as a way out of poverty by offering high wages for military service in stark contrast to the low salaries available to the few qualified professionals able to find work in the camps.

'I would like to become a children's doctor, but Palestinians do not have the right here in Lebanon to become doctors. We are only refugees here.' Warda, aged 13

'In the 50's (education) was the 'sure line' for the Palestinians - everyone was pushing their children in the schools. In my generation our parents provided us with everything so that we could go and learn. We didn't have electricity, just a lamp, but we worked really hard. At that time about 90% of Palestinian people were educated. This went on until the 70s. Even before '48, Palestine had high levels of education. In the 70s it changed with the PLO who came to Lebanon then. This was a big turn in the life of the Palestinians. The PLO raised the hope of the Palestinians by saying 'it's time to struggle to go back'. So even children were taken out of schools or encouraged to leave schools indirectly. If a 15 year old registered as a scout and carried a gun for one night he would have a salary of more than his father or his brother who had graduated from university. This made people think firstly that the priority was to go back to the homeland, secondly, with the financial restrictions of

life, getting this money was easy - they didn't think of their education. Those who were sent to do medicine or engineering didn't have any opportunity to work in Lebanon. My niece was always the top student in medicine, and now she earns less than anyone in the family, only \$100 - we support her. So it was a shock to some families to find that a child working in a garage could get \$100 in two weeks. All this turned the perception of the importance of education.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

The response

50 years' work in Lebanon

Save the Children has been involved with Palestinians in Lebanon since the early 1950s, at first through UNRWA relief programmes in the refugee camps, and then through education and community programmes which evolved with the input of the local community in response to their changing needs. The following paragraphs outline the different phases of the programme.

• *Relief programmes*

During the 1950s and 1960s, Save the Children gave financial support to basic needs programmes in the refugee camps including shelter, food, clean water, health and medical care, as well as basic primary and education. During this phase, neither UNRWA nor Save the Children sought to address problems related to emotional or psychological damage in children. Educational provision in the camps followed the Lebanese national curriculum and focused on traditional subjects, with no provision for creative arts, humanities, sport or recreation.

• *Orphan Help Programme*

During the devastating Israeli attack of Lebanon in 1982, massacres in the refugee camps left large numbers of children orphaned. It was at this stage that Save the Children became more actively involved, establishing an 'Alternative Orphan Help Programme' which supported the fostering of orphans in their extended families or with childless couples through direct financial assistance; advice on dealing with problems related to caring for children who had witnessed and experienced violence and loss; and liaison with welfare, health and education services provided by the UNRWA authorities. This initial approach of supporting orphans through traditional family and community structures rather than institutions became the basis on which an educational programme linked to the needs of children in the camps was developed together with the community (explored in more depth later on).

• *Pre-school programme*

Through the work of the Orphan Help Programme, Save the Children staff soon identified a significant gap in services for pre-school children. UNRWA was mandated to provide pre and post-natal health care for children up to 3, and primary education for children from the age of 6. The effective exclusion of children between the ages of 3 to 6 from public services not only meant that problems could not be identified and addressed, but also ignored the importance of children's individual developmental needs at this crucial age, especially in a situation where families were often under pressure and struggling to meet basic childcare requirements.

'Save the Children began to lead the way forward towards a more holistic approach addressing learning and stimulation, communication, recreation and relaxation, continuity and havens of child centred activities based on play, creative arts, storytelling, drama and folklore' Julia Gilkes, Save the Children Middle East Early Childhood Development Advisor

Building on the links already established with children and families, in 1984 Save the Children began to run pre-school groups in UNRWA premises in the camps, both for orphans as well as for other children in the camps. In addition to providing pre-school care for 4-6 year old children of working mothers, the kindergartens offered play and stimulation in a safe environment that provided children 'with opportunities for self expression through creative activities such as role play, drawing, stories and song. Through a combination of experimentation, observation, external advice, training and links with other organisations, local staff were able to develop these activities in a way which was responsive to the children's own developmental needs. An awareness of the children's home lives built up through close contact with their families was an essential part of this process. This was strengthened by encouraging family involvement in kindergarten activities as an opportunity for learning about the educational and developmental needs of their children. Kindergarten staff were encouraged to develop working links with UNRWA primary school staff and to help children make the difficult transition into formal primary education.

• *After school clubs*

As work with families, children and teachers developed, the needs of older children of both primary and secondary school age began to emerge. In the Orphan Help Programme, many foster parents experienced difficulties with older children who displayed psychological and behavioural problems related to their experience of conflict and the pressures of life in the camps. Many children were required to work to contribute to family survival, making studying difficult or impossible to keep up, while those still in school often fell behind in classes or dropped out completely. It was clear

that these problems were not limited to children in the Orphan Help Programme. Save the Children responded by opening after-school and Friday clubs for older children, usually using the same premises as the kindergartens. The clubs provided older children with creative and self-expressive activities not available within the formal school system, as well as remedial education and homework support.

'The idea of establishing the clubs originally was to provide children with somewhere to do their homework and to have contact with each other and to provide them with safe areas to play and to do something fruitful. In the camps there are only narrow roads and in 87 it was a difficult situation for children to hang around the streets'

Alia Shana'a, Siblin Summer Camp August 7-27 1989

- ***Summer activities***

From 1987 the programme with older children was extended to include summer activities often run jointly with other organisations. These activities included residential summer camps, some of which were held in Lebanese villages, providing an opportunity for children from the camps to meet with Moslems, Christians and Druze from the Lebanese community.

- ***Community involvement and children's participation***

As with the kindergartens, liaising with families and teachers was an important part of the work of Save the Children staff in the clubs. From the start, the kindergartens and clubs included meetings and activities with families in support of activities carried out with children. These meetings also served as a channel to provide information and advice on issues affecting the whole family such as health and nutrition. During the 1990s, the participation of families became more active with parents sharing more in the planning and implementation of the programme. The role of children in planning, running and evaluating the activities of the clubs has also been more fully developed in recent years through a range of initiatives including: child to child activities; the production of magazines; children's committees; the training of older children to work as volunteers with younger children in the clubs and summer activities.

By 1996, the kindergartens and after school clubs had developed into all day centres for children and family activities open to all children, with morning and afternoon activities for children attending different shifts at school. The main focus of these centres continues to be educational, providing a space for the staff, children and their families to develop informal educational and recreational activities which are closely linked to family life and the wider community, but aim to complement the formal education available in UNRWA schools.

A RESPONSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

This section explores in more depth the mechanics of how the specific needs of children growing up in the unique context of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were identified and addressed. It shows how an approach which has consistently stressed partnership at all levels (between Save the Children staff and families, UNRWA authorities, other NGOs, etc) has been successful in developing locally owned, alternative educational models which address children's psychological and developmental needs. It also explores the obstacles and challenges encountered, some of which have been overcome while others remain, highlighting some of the limitations of NGO work in this context.

Understanding the context

Through long term involvement in relief and development work in Lebanon, Save the Children was able to build up an in-depth understanding of the situation of Palestinian refugees. It was this familiarity with the situation that enabled Save the Children to quickly identify the gaps in service provision to children directly affected by the crisis in 1982 (Israeli invasion and camp massacres) and respond quickly with the establishment of the Orphan Help and Pre-School Programmes. Long term involvement of international NGOs with a specific community or programme is often seen as a weak point, raising questions of dependence and sustainability. In this case, the length of Save the Children's commitment (from 1948 to the present) was a major factor in building up the confidence and respect of the refugee community and building of a programme which successfully facilitates links between users and providers of services as well as developing practical responses to gaps in provision. Furthermore, the unique nature of this context, where, in the absence of their own government or local authority structures, the Palestinian community in Lebanon has, for the past 50 years, been effectively dependent on UNRWA and other international and non-governmental bodies clearly highlights that long-term involvement can be a valid response.

Understanding children's needs

Because the family was the starting point for the programme, Save the Children staff (all Palestinians living in the camps) were able to build up a sound understanding of the reality of children's lives and needs. Home visits, combined with the staff's role of liaising with teachers, health personnel and social workers, provided insights into children's lives and behaviour from a range of different perspectives. In this way, staff were able to appreciate and analyse, together with other members of the community, the impact of conflict and related pressures on the children's personal development,

including obstacles to learning through the existing formal educational system. This was an important element at the beginning of the programme's development. It was also part of an ongoing process of constantly reviewing and considering the pressures faced by children based on practical experience of working closely with them, their families and other members of the community on a day to day basis. The following observations were made of children's behaviour at a summer camp:⁵

- many children find it difficult to play as children, have fun and enjoy themselves
- there is much aggressive and hostile behaviour between the children, and to the adults
- some children have stomach problems which we think are stress related and have been referred to the hospital
- children from Ein Hilwe are particularly naughty and uncontrollable (as they live in a camp which lacks authority at different levels)
- it is not easy working with these children, especially the 10-12 year olds as that is a difficult age anyway (adolescence)
- the children seem to be so full of such furious energy
- the children lack discipline, sometimes we are obliged to be tough

Over the past decade attention is shifting to the role of children in identifying needs and developing programmes. The focus on self-expressive activities in both kindergarten and after school clubs forms part of a process of encouraging children to reflect on and communicate their own life experiences, perspectives and aspirations, in ways that take into account the difficult situations in which children live and the traditional approach to childhood that offers little opportunity for challenging authority or seeking change. This approach, which builds on children's natural curiosity and interest, has been extended to children's active participation in running and developing activities through child to child projects and the children's committees which play a role in the clubs' decision making processes. Ways have also been sought to involve children more actively in the monitoring and evaluation of the programmes: a programme review workshop in February 1998 included not only reflection/discussion groups with children and youth, but also interviews in the community carried out by young people. Pre-school children were also encouraged to express their feelings and views of the programme through drawings and other creative activities.

'I went to the kindergarten at three years, I used to suffer from fear so much, I was even afraid of the ants. I was worried all the time, afraid indoors and outdoors and I had no idea how to express my fears. But now I love music, to sing and play the tabla. Being in the club has developed my confidence, and I enjoy taking responsibility as a volunteer in the summer activities, and meeting with people with responsibility through the Child to Child programme. I want to become a social worker, to reach this you have to be trusted by others, share in their experiences and take care of your appearance.' Abdullah Abu Leil, 16 years. Orphan. Alternative Care Programme, El Buss Refugee Camp

Developing an appropriate educational response

Formal education provision for Palestinians is limited, with a basic curriculum, traditionally taught in crowded and under-resourced conditions. Through the clubs and kindergartens, it was possible to provide activities which not only strengthened and supported the formal education available to children, but also responded to their wider developmental needs through play, drawing, music, expressions of cultural identity, sport, recreation and vocational training. Over the years, these activities have been developed through a process of experimentation, observation and active consultation with children and their parents.

'In my study (research with children in 4th year of primary school) I found... hidden illiteracy when they are in school but don't learn to read or write. The teacher reads a sentence on the board and asks the children to read it, but the child isn't reading, he's just repeating. In the clubs children are helped with their schoolwork, but in the learning process they are also building their character and self-confidence. They now train to be leaders when they do child to child or other activities, so it is really improving their confidence. They are learning more about their culture, their lives, themselves, their rights, their community and how to live within it. This is all education. It is helping them improve their school achievements and behaviour in schools as well. The recreational activities help them as here they have something to do and aren't just in the streets. Parents feel that their children's personality and attitude is better, their school results are better.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

The children themselves are very conscious of the limitations of the education system and have a clear sense of what the different activities in the clubs can offer and how they have helped them personally. The following views were expressed by children in the review workshop of February 1998⁶:

- ***I had no interest or aim in my life***
- ***I had no self-confidence or self-esteem***

- *I was so afraid and timid and needed reassurance*
- *I was alone and had no friends and did not think about others*
- *I needed help with my studies, as it was difficult at home*
- *There was nowhere safe to play*
- *We are in big classes and the teachers shout at and hit us*
- *I am afraid to ask questions and afraid of teachers*
- *I needed to know more about my homeland, the songs, the stories, the folklore*

'Help with lessons and sport is important. In UNRWA schools they are hit by teachers, shouted at, and told to stop talking all the time. In the clubs, the staff are interested in them, provide a place for study and help with problems in the homework. They laugh together, talk, have fun and she is confident to speak and ask questions, and is not afraid of the staff at all. At school there is football for boys and some P.E. but often teachers cancel it if it is at the end of the day, so that they can go home early. It is only 1 hour a week anyway. At the club there are other activities, making up games with balls' Nihaya (age 12), Alternative Care Programme, El Buss Refugee Camp

Training staff and volunteers has been an essential element in developing the awareness, skills and methodologies needed to develop educational programmes which can respond to children's wider psychological and developmental needs. Training programmes and workshops addressing both personal and professional development have been provided by the local staff themselves with support and input from SCF's regional advisors (in ECD and disability) as well as external consultants in specialised areas such as toymaking, and other NGOs in the region including UNICEF and ARC (see below). In addition to formal training, staff have been encouraged to support and help one another in developing their own skills through practical work experience:

'At first I was afraid of dealing with little children, aged 3-5 years, but with experience and support of the staff and some training I became more advanced, and learned to work well with the children. I learned about games and play activities, the psychological life of the children, and how children learn. I learned to make things from nothing. I found useless things could be used to make games and toys, cards, files and so on. My own character was also developing with more self-confidence and the ability to enjoy successful relationships with the community. I am known to many people and families and respected. I have a deeper knowledge of my society' Sawsan Shehadi. Kindergarten teacher, Rashadieh Camp.

Ensuring community ownership

The starting point of working within families, exposed staff to the importance of encouraging community ownership and participation in order to provide educational activities which are relevant, useful and appropriate. A number of different strategies have been used to promote broad-based participation, including: the creation of parents committees; children's committees (from 7 - 18 years); recruitment of volunteers from the community to help in the clubs; youth volunteers to help with summer activities. Offering training for all participants in the clubs including staff, parents, children and volunteers in a variety of areas ranging from literacy and hygiene to fundraising has been an important element in fostering more active involvement and a sense of ownership. In this way, members of the community have been able to analyse their own and their children's needs and develop the skills needed to put their ideas into practice.

“As well as children's magazines there are parents magazines in all the clubs and kindergartens. Members of the parents' committees write in the magazines and they are kept in the resource centres. We are beginning now to call the clubs community centres. We have a lot of involvement of the community in the workshops with mothers, volunteers, fundraising and so on. The clubs are supported by the community - whenever we need prizes for competitions, they go around to shops and ask for contributions. Also activities like child to child are carried out with the wider community.” Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

Of course, this process has not always been easy, and many parents have at first been sceptical about the value of the clubs. The first step to showing parents the potential value of the clubs for their children has been to invite them to visit and take part in the activities so that they can get a better understanding of their purpose. Save the Children staff themselves are members of the community and form an important link with parents and other adults to whom they are often well known. The importance of this dynamic and the need for continuity within the programme in order to build strong community links has led to a policy of emphasis on recruitment and development of staff from within the communities:

'For a pre-school programme to achieve real community involvement, the selection of the staff is all-important. A teacher who comes from the community has a number of in-built advantages both in the detailed knowledge of the families with whom she will be working and her acceptability by the community as a whole.' ⁷

Many of the current staff were originally children in the kindergartens and clubs who went on to become volunteers and then permanent staff members. A kindergarten teacher now working at Rashidieh camp reflects on her own experiences as a girl participating in Save the Children summer activities in 1989:

'I remembered the days that I spent at Siblin Centre, then I made a comparison between my childhood and being a teacher and I admitted that each age has its own needs. During summer camp, I owned self-confidence, the ability to face problems and the flexibility of solving problems. At summer camp I realised the importance of the existence of the complete communication between the children and teachers. My self-confidence is increased and I learned many deep things about my society. I have now successful relationships with the community.' ⁸

Challenging attitudes towards education

The process of involving members of the community in the activities and running of the clubs also seeks to challenge and change existing attitudes which see education as something separate from children's experience and home environment, provided by professionals in a formal school environment. Encouraging the active participation of different members of the community aims to raise awareness of the links between children's developmental and educational needs.

'The kindergarten schedule was new and strange for parents because learning through playing and actions, besides children's rights weren't recognised by them. Kindergarten according to them was known as school. In the beginning, there were a lot of questions about why there weren't desks and boards in classes. But later they trusted the staff and the parents chose to put their children in our Kindergarten and this was a challenge to us.' Ali Hweidi, Rashydieh kindergarten team leader

'When we started (the kindergartens), parents used to argue with us that they wanted the children to be taught in the centre. They wanted books and homework, so we had to discuss with them and involve them in the process. We invited mothers to come and watch their children playing. They used to come and sit with the children and help with plasticine and so on. The parents begin to understand it when they do it themselves. Now they don't ask in the same way as they did before because they know how much the children are busy and learning through these activities. They appreciate it more. It is important that this process is continuous and we develop it as new parents come in. We share more and more with mothers and the communities. They are now part of the process, even when we face problems with new people and mothers, they tell them about their experience, how their children are doing in school and their personality is developing; 'now my child is open and not worried to meet people' - they start to tell each other about their experience with Save the Children. It is mainly mothers, very few fathers because they are busy and because this is something traditional in our community - mothers are responsible for very young children.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

Both teachers and parents can begin to appreciate the role of education as a powerful tool in responding to and tackling the effects of ongoing conflict as they see the impact of creative and self-expressive activities on their children's psychological well-being, behaviour, and communication within the family. In addition, staff and parents have experienced the potential of education as a positive force for change through individual conflict resolution. This has been most clearly demonstrated through summer camps held in Lebanese villages, involving children from the local Lebanese communities and Palestinian children from the refugee camps, where creative and recreational activities acted as a 'bridge' between children from communities in conflict with each other.

*'At the beginning of the camp, some problems happened among Lebanese and Palestinians. It was a real reflection of the situation. It took us time to let them play as children coming to have fun and enjoy their time. This summer camp was a unique one to include Lebanese children from Amal movement families and Palestinians from the camps which suffered a lot from Amal movement siege. Some of them lost their families during the camp war, yet children could enjoy their time together when they learned songs for Palestine and Lebanon. Lot of discussions took place about loving each other.'*⁹

Because the programme is firmly located within the community it is also possible to tackle sensitive cultural attitudes which impact on children's educational opportunities, in particular those of girls. While enrolment rates for girls in formal education are high, there are pressures from within the community which threaten girls' rights to educational opportunities through extracurricular activities such as the Save the Children clubs. Save the Children staff are conscious of their role, as members of both the local and the NGO communities, in tackling these attitudes.

'The parents have no problem. Our problem was with Islamic groups, though we didn't face any problem with parents. We have always had more girls than boys. Some areas now are affected because the Islamic groups make problems to us and to other NGOs. After the prayer on Friday they were telling the people 'don't send your children to the clubs'. This year in the summer camp we had only one-third girls.'

Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

Being flexible and responsive to sudden change

Because of an emphasis on a partnership approach to working with other organisations and all sectors of the community, the programme was able to respond effectively to children's needs in times of crisis and emergency as well as to the problems faced daily by children in a situation of long-term conflict. During the camp wars of 1986, in addition to participating in the UN coordinated emergency response, Save the Children's specific role was to focus on immediate education and play provision. Given

the upheaval which led to death, destruction, displacement and the disruption of normal health and education services, the rapid provision by Save the Children staff of 'normal' kindergarten services in whatever spaces they could find (often their own houses) was an essential element in relieving the effects of the crisis by re-establishing some kind of stability and security for children and for their families as well.

*'El Hilweh kindergarten closed because of the situation and fight in Saida area from 24/11/86 till 18/12/86. The cover outside the classrooms got 12 small holes because of splits from a bomb which exploded very close. All the teachers are good. During the period, when the kindergarten was closing, the teachers worked in the survey and distribution done by the joint Relief Committee. Since 18/12/86 the work in El Hilweh kindergarten is normal and going well. About 95 of the children are back. The rest left El Hilweh and they are living in Saida.'*¹⁰

Again in 1996, in the aftermath of the Qana massacre, Save the Children took part in an immediate and coordinated response from NGOs and the Lebanese authorities, and worked quickly and effectively with other local organisations to set up children's activities in the displacement centres.

Seeking complementarity with UNRWA educational services

From the start, Save the Children's educational programmes in the camps have sought to complement and strengthen the formal educational provision offered by UNRWA. The pre-school groups were established in response to the gap in services for 3-6 year olds. Activities focussed on early child development and preparation for entry to UNRWA primary schools, using child-centred methods.

Close contact with UNRWA teachers has led to practical cooperation on the transition of children from pre-school to primary, including children visiting for 2 days a week before formally enrolling in school, UNRWA teachers receiving files and evaluations of individual children coming from pre-school groups, and Save the Children staff visiting children in their new schools to give support and ensure that all is well.

Research carried out in 1994 with groups of children in the fourth year of UNRWA primary schools to assess the continued impact of the pre-school programme on achievement in formal school (including a control group who had not been in pre-school) confirmed the role of pre-school in helping children to benefit more from formal educational provision.¹¹

In the case of older children, after school and Friday clubs have offered homework support and remedial education as well as activities to address the social and emotional problems which can frequently disrupt formal education. The role of Save the Children

staff in liaison between schools and families is an important element in identifying and addressing problems faced by individual pupils which may be interfering with their ability to study. In addition to this social work role carried out by Save the Children staff, activities and initiatives have been developed by children in the clubs themselves which aim to strengthen the links with UNRWA schools:

'We have a lot of activities with the schools through the children's groups: the education groups exchange bulletin boards (prepared in the clubs) with the schools. Also the schools have follow up with the children who are in the clubs -if there is any problem they contact the club before the parents to discuss the problem together and find the solution. Through the clubs the schools have this contact with the parents.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

A further aim of establishing good working links with teachers in the UNRWA schools is to attempt to influence teaching methodologies in the formal school system based on the educational approaches pioneered through the kindergartens and clubs. This is promoted through visits and joint training workshops (for example on making and using educational toys from recycled materials). Parents involved in the work of the clubs have also played an important part in raising UNRWA teachers' awareness of the value and potential of child centred teaching methods:

'UNRWA teachers of first and second elementary were invited to visit the kindergartens to be introduced to the kindergarten curriculum and work and to compare with their work. It is a trial to fill the gap between the two approaches. The kindergarten work is centred on subjects and books. The child in UNRWA schools finds himself among 40 - 50 children in a class full of desks, no toys or attractive pictures or means to learn. He is unable to move or play. As play is important and the children learn quicker through it, UNRWA teachers were introduced to all the toys produced by SCF kindergartens staff. The parents committee participated in the discussion which took place between kindergarten staff and UNRWA teachers. Parents were defending the kindergarten approach and they wished that UNRWA school take into consideration the child's needs and abilities when they plan any activity or lesson.' ¹²

Forging working links with UNRWA staff in the formal school sector has often been challenging: UNRWA teachers face formidable restrictions with large classes, few resources, a basic and traditional curriculum to follow, little training and low salaries. While it is sometimes possible to work with and influence individual teachers, it has proved much harder and often impossible to influence the wider organisation to bring

more consistent and lasting changes in order to benefit children in the classroom. In this sense, the potential for cross learning between the formal and non-formal activities to date has been limited. Similarly, there is currently limited optimism that changes in the Lebanese system may bring about a review of curriculum and methodology within the UNRWA schools. The extent of any reform of the UNRWA education programme hinges on the very future and status of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, in addition to financial resource problems of an increasing Palestinian population drawing on a static UN budget.

Paradoxically, in seeking to influence UNRWA in the interests of children's wider developmental and educational opportunities, Save the Children have often found it easier to work constructively with other UNRWA bodies (health, welfare, technical engineering) than with the education sector.

One of the fundamental problems in working with UNRWA and seeking to influence their education programmes is that, the provider of formal education services here is not a national government. UNRWA is mandated to provide certain services, but is not representative of the Palestinian community, and is not permanent. Both these factors impact on the ability of UNRWA to develop more responsive educational services as well as on Save the Children's ability to influence any long-term changes.

Influencing and learning - partnership with other organisations

In the same way that staff have worked to build links with UNRWA teachers and officials, working links have been established with other organisations working with the Palestinian community in Lebanon. As well as seeking to avoid duplication and promote complementarity, the aim of this partnership approach is to influence the educational practice of other organisations working with children, while at the same time drawing on their skills and experience in order to strengthen and enrich Save the Children's programmes. The systematic documentation of Save the Children's experience, production and sharing of appropriate materials and joint training with staff of other NGOs have been key elements of Save the Children's partnership work with other organisations.

'This is an unmeasurable process, but through the training and visits we exchange experience, so staff may pick up ideas and use them with the children in their work. I know that some of the staff were very shy when they started to go to outside training other than our own training, for instance going to Beirut for UNICEF training on peace education. The impact on their personality was clear; many had never been out of their camps and they had to go to Beirut or the mountains for a weekend or week and this helped them in developing their personalities as well as developing their skills and capacity which they can use in the work. Whatever we do wouldn't be

enough if we weren't in touch with outside experience.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon.

Working closely with other local NGOs with different perspectives and special expertise, offers the opportunity to draw on existing work experience in relation to emerging programme priorities. One such area is disability - in the camps there are high levels of disability in children, both conflict related and congenital. Problems faced by NGOs working in this area have included both lack of services and also negative attitudes to disability. Save the Children staff have worked to include disabled children across the programme and have drawn on the approaches of other NGOs, such as the Jihad Al-Wazir Foundation who have advised and supported Save the Children in the integration of disabled children into the clubs. This kind of exchange is often mutually beneficial but in a context which is highly politically charged, coordination with other NGOs is not always straightforward:

'If they feel that Save the Children is doing good, advanced work, some local NGOs are afraid to lose their own standing politically - many are related to political parties and each wants to dominate Palestinians in Lebanon. Now with the changes in the political situation with withdrawal of fighters, social work and NGOs are seen more as a way of keeping strength and dominance and position in the community. Save the Children is seen as non-political which gives us a good position in the community. Ordinary people want to send their children to non-political NGOs -people are becoming less political now. For example, it is easier for UNRWA to cooperate with us because we are neutral and international. This gives us strength on the ground. Sometimes we have problems with fundraising because people think that we are rich because we are international. This creates jealousy.'
Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

Building on experiences through sharing at a regional level

Because of their continuing status as refugees and the limitations placed on travel and work, the Palestinian community in Lebanon are particularly isolated both within Lebanon and within the region. Making links with other educational and child focused initiatives around the Arab world has therefore been an important element in building up skills and resources within the programme through sharing and learning from other experiences in the region. This has been possible both through Save the Children and through the Arab Resource Collective (ARC), a regional organisation based in Beirut and Cyprus which translates and develops resources for work with children in Arabic through their 'childhood programme'.

Given the practical problems associated with ongoing conflict and isolation, access to high quality, appropriate and culturally sensitive resources has been particularly difficult. In addition to these practical problems, many of the resources available in Arabic (particularly in Lebanon where secondary languages are French and English) are translations or adaptations of European or American materials, with few primary sources drawn from the Arabic experience. A key element of ARC'S work are training workshops where NGOs from around the region come together to share ideas, experience and approaches developed through practical work with children. Ideas picked up at these workshops are taken back to the programmes, tested and further developed, often with input from children, parents and local partners, and then fed back to ARC through the regional workshops. In this way, ARC has been able to build up a body of resources for training and practical educational work with children, based on experience on the ground.

Save the Children, and particularly the Lebanon programme, have worked closely with ARC over the past decade to build up their capacity for the mutual benefit of child focused organisations working in the region. As well as providing funding to ARC as part of the regional programme, Save the Children's regional Early Childhood Development advisor has been seconded for 50% of her time as a resource person.

For local staff in the Lebanon, the impact of sharing at a regional level through ARC has not just represented access to improved materials, but also a way of breaking the isolation of living and working in the camps under what often feel like siege conditions, and raising self-esteem and community pride in the quality of work that the Palestinian community have been able to develop in challenging circumstances;

'(sharing with other organisations) helps to open your mind to new ideas and to think about and assess your own work. Not just the regional link, but also the links with London. Though the (ARC) workshops in Cyprus we realise that we have a lot to share which motivates us. The workshops aren't training, but sharing and learning from each other. The links with London have also been important in sharing learning. What we learn we can bring back to the other staff and do training. The children benefit from this.' Alia Shana'a, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Lebanon

What has been learnt?

The benefits of partnership

This case study highlights the importance of developing a range of partnerships at different levels. Promoting the involvement of parents in the programmes has been

mutually beneficial, ensuring that the programmes are relevant and appropriate to local needs, and helping adults address their own need for normality and self-determination by taking some control over their children's educational development. Similarly, by participating in the development and running of activities, children's self-esteem and sense of identity have benefitted. Promoting partnership with UNRWA (the UN agency responsible for education provision to Palestinian refugees) and other NGOs has opened up opportunities for sharing skills and experience, although scope for changing practice is limited given political and economic constraints.

The role of education in tackling the effects of war

The experience of this programme demonstrates above all that educational programmes have a key role to play in helping children and communities cope with living in a situation of constant insecurity and future uncertainty.

The potential of educational programmes in tackling the psychological effects of long-term conflict on children is highlighted in this example. Adopting an approach which looks at the whole needs of the child, the programme offered a safe environment for children to play and socialise, responsive educational activities based on constructive play and interactive learning, and cultural activities to reinforce a sense of identity and belonging.

Involving parents and other family members in the process provided an opportunity to help families identify and tackle problems of communication which are often rooted in the experience of living in a context of ongoing violence and insecurity.

Working to change educational attitudes and practices

The Lebanon case study reinforces the experience of other case studies (e.g. Mongolia), that change is not uniform, but tends to occur in pockets. Changes in attitudes to education and the potential of child centred approaches have come about as the community have seen the practical benefits of play based and creative activities. A strategy of working solely through staff drawn from the Palestinian refugee community was a key factor in developing good community interaction and reinforces the experience documented in the case studies from India and Mali, that local people can quickly become effective early years teachers, given appropriate training and support.

It has proved much more difficult to achieve a wider impact through influencing UNRWA's approach to education. Even in the context of moves towards reforming the national Lebanese education system, UNRWA is inflexible in considering more child-focused approaches. This is primarily a result of its limited mandate as a service provider, alongside its financial insecurity and uncertain future.

The study demonstrates the need to develop strategies around such bottlenecks: continuing to promote change to education in the formal sector, where there has been some success in changing the attitudes and practices of individual teachers; concentrating efforts on areas where influence is possible, in this case bridging the gap between the reality of children's life experience and formal education by filling gaps in provision of recreational and creative activities, easing the transition from home to school life, and supporting children as they pass through primary and secondary school to get the most out of the education available.

Problems of sustainability and ownership

The Lebanon study raises the contentious issue of the long-term sustainability of programmes in contexts of on-going conflict. When outside agencies started work in the Palestinian refugee camps, no-one predicted that 50 years on there would still be no political solution. Although outside agencies and their donors do not have the resources or the mandate to take on the government's role in providing education on a long-term basis, the refugees have a clear unmet need that demands action.

In the case of the Palestinians, Save the Children's strategic decision to provide ongoing support to send a message of solidarity and commitment to the community has been central to the success of its programme, but has been difficult to sustain because of barriers to securing and diversifying the funding base.

The length of NGO commitment is often a key factor in inspiring the trust and respect of communities. Here it has also been instrumental in building up genuine community capacity to implement and manage relevant education programmes. Donors could usefully reconsider their linear interpretation of sustainability (as demanding that they should avoid long-term financial support), particularly in contexts where that long-term commitment is itself a precondition of the early success, quality and security of the programme. Making such a strategic decision would surely be better than falling into UNRWA's position of having to maintain an ongoing presence under a temporary and rigid mandate with declining per-capita funding.

Editors' Conclusions

- The long-term nature of the conflict and the insecure situation of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have required a long-term commitment on the part of Save the Children. This has been the basis both for developing the trust needed to innovate in such a depressing environment, and for developing communities' capacity to take more control over their children's education.
- The context of uncertainty, as third and fourth generation Palestinians continue to live in limbo in Lebanon, challenges our assumptions about the purpose of basic education. In this case, a useful education is one that helps children cope with life in the present, by addressing the effects of psychological and emotional stress, and reaffirming cultural identity.
- To achieve this, Save the Children worked closely with the local community to develop appropriate and effective education services that are complementary to the official education provision.
- Given that the value of education is widely questioned, with so few hopes of future advancement from school-based learning, Save the Children had to prioritise changing attitudes. The focus of kindergartens and after-school clubs was on developing an understanding of education as being an extension of children's experiences and their home environment.
- The programme also demonstrated effective roles for education in conflict resolution, such as the summer camps involving children from both Lebanese and Palestinian communities.
- Despite attention focused on sharing learning with the other key organisations, influence over the UN relief agency's teaching methods has been confined to the level of individual teachers, not changing organisation-wide ways of working. The UN agency's inability to reform is largely a consequence of its own impermanent and underfunded mandate as a service provider.

Notes

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³ UNRWA 1997

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A chance to start again - Rehabilitating child soldiers - A case study from Liberia



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What are the problems for children?

The civil war

Seven years of civil war devastated the political, social and economic life of Liberia in the period 1989 to 1997. The conflict was characterised by indiscriminate killing and mass displacement of the civilian population as a direct result of fighting between different factions, largely divided along ethnic lines. Of Liberia's pre-war population of 2.4 million, more than 150,000 died, 700,000 people (half of whom were children), became refugees in neighbouring Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, and a further

one million were displaced from their homes, some as many as four or five times. National structures and services and local community coping mechanisms deteriorated rapidly amidst widespread destruction and population displacement¹.

Since 1997, Liberia has entered a notional period of peace and attention has centred on rehabilitation and reconstruction backed up by international assistance. However, the peace is fragile and there is a strong potential for further conflict in the years to come.

Impact of the conflict on children and child soldiers

Living through conflict and its aftermath has a huge impact on children's lives². Children in Liberia were often in constant fear of their lives, witnessing at first hand the violence of war, and have been severely affected by trauma and instability. In February 1994 research revealed that 61% of high school students in the capital Monrovia had seen someone killed, tortured or raped, and that 71% had lost a close friend or relative. Many other children were affected directly by the war: being uprooted from their homes, often separated from their families through displacement, missing out on their education and experiencing the impact of economic collapse on their families³.

In addition, a number of children actively participated in the conflict, an experience which had a devastating impact on their lives (see Box on Child Soldiers). Figures for this group vary significantly, reflecting the difficulty of obtaining data in times of conflict and particularly from rival factions. UNICEF estimates 15,000 child soldiers, whereas Save the Children's calculation gives a lower figure of 8,000, representing about 20% of the factions' armed forces⁴.

Despite their different experience of war, in the post conflict period civilian and ex-combatant children now face similar problems with regard to educational needs: Both groups have missed out on vital years of education due to the collapse of the school system and displacement, lost members of their family, experienced extreme trauma, and been deprived of key phases in their development, limiting their preparation for life skills.

Box 1: Child Soldiers in Liberia

All of the principal warring factions in Liberia used children in warfare, through both forced and voluntary recruitment. The position of child soldiers was primarily a servile one in which they were treated as slaves to faction leaders. During their service in the war, children served as porters, checkpoint guards, spies, executioners and front-line fighters. Children who received combat training were subject to the same conditions as adults as part of an effort to toughen them. While most child fighters were boys, girls were also involved both in conflict and through forced recruitment as soldiers' 'wives'.

Throughout the conflict, children were ideal targets for recruitment as they proved to be easier to control and manipulate than adults. Between 1993 and 1995 the number of armed factions fighting the war increased and these groups found themselves competing for recruits. As the war continued and most adult males had either already been recruited or fled the fighting, children, particularly the most vulnerable groups and those without families, were actively targeted and rounded up. In total, Save the Children estimates that as many as 10,000 child soldiers were active during the conflict. A significant number joined alongside their father or an older male relative, but as the war evolved, abduction of children by different factions became more widespread.

The reasons for children 'volunteering' to become soldiers are complex. Survival and protection reflect the primary reasons. Becoming a soldier offered children access to food, a commodity in increasingly short supply as the war continued. It also offered protection to the children and their families: some parents actively encouraged their children to join a faction to discourage harassment from other fighters in the area. Interviews conducted with Liberian children who were drawn into the conflict reveal the range of reasons:

'My parents were killed in 1990 so I joined.... in self-defence' 17 year old ex-combatant

'When the recruitment bus came, a friend told me its purpose and advantages and I just jumped in' 13 year old ex-combatant

'I was very scared and confused. Rebels took away all our food, clothes and money, looted our town and killed our town chief' 16 year old ex-combatant⁵

The education sector in Liberia Before the war, state education in Liberia was traditional in approach and low in quality. The education sector was struggling to cope with demographic pressures (over 40% of the population was under 15) and financial

constraints. Liberia had the second lowest literacy rates in the world, at around 17%⁶ and in 1989 only 35% of active teachers had undergone formal teacher training⁷. Before the outbreak of the war, the Ministry of Education (MoE) attempted to extend education by opening three to four state primary schools in each of the country's districts.

There were also a number of private schools run by religious institutions, companies or individuals located throughout the country but these were not widely accessible to the majority of Liberians as many could not afford to buy the uniforms or pay the fees.

Funding became a major problem following the coup and subsequent death of President Samuel Doe in 1990. Teachers in state schools were not paid regularly, books and other materials were in short supply, and as a result the standard of teaching deteriorated. In areas where schools actually existed, many were in disrepair, with cramped classrooms. Cost was a major deterrent to families, especially the poorest, sending their children to school: enrolment fees and minimum requirements such as school uniforms represented a heavy financial burden beyond the reach of many families, both rural and urban⁸.

The long period of war and instability has had a cumulative effect on the basic infrastructure of the country, devastating local services. The education sector was no exception. Many school facilities were looted or vandalised during the years of instability. As fighting continued, many people, including teachers, were displaced and increasing numbers of children had no access to regular education due to displacement, school closure or recruitment to a warring faction, who exploited their lack of education and experience. As Liberia emerged from the war, the Ministry of Education found itself desperately short of facilities and expertise (a problem which has continued throughout the post-conflict period) and under pressure to provide education to the large number of children who had not only missed out on vital years of education but had been severely affected by the trauma and instability of war.

In addition to these challenges, attempts to resume basic services such as education took place in a heavily constrained environment. The war had shattered the national economy and government funds were scarce. Job opportunities, particularly for those without relevant skills and experience such as demobilised fighters, were few and far between. As a result, many families and communities found themselves with few resources with which to support themselves and the education of their children.

The Response

How the Save the Children programme evolved

Save the Children started work in Liberia in 1991, during the war years, and has become a “big” player in the sectors of food security, health and social welfare

activities. This broad-based approach reflected a strategic choice to build up the credibility and authority of the organisation to subsequently engage in debate on more contentious issues such as child protection and rights. In the post-conflict period, Save the Children's work is shifting towards broader rehabilitation and developmental initiatives. Work with former child soldiers has formed a key component of its programme. What is interesting about its work in this area, is that what started as a spontaneous response to the immediate needs of a group of children evolved into a broad programme of support to the national process of demobilisation, taking the agency into unplanned activities such as support to “*catch up*” education for children who had missed out on education as a result of war.

The initial objective of Save the Children's work with child soldiers was to support family tracing and reunification at the point of their formal demobilisation. Transit centres were created as a temporary input to provide demobilised children with a secure base from which to trace their families, and to assist them in their reintegration both into their families and the wider community. The programme was based on Save the Children's work with a small group of former child combatants (described in detail in the following section) which provided the organisation with practical experience and insight into the situation and needs of the group as a basis for support to the formal programme of national demobilisation, started in late 1996

The transit centre approach was largely modelled on the work of other child-focused partner organisations in Liberia, who already had substantial experience of working with children with particular needs, such as street children and demobilised children. This approach was 'child-centred' in that it took the needs of children and their situation as its starting point.

In common with other governments emerging from periods of extensive conflict, the Liberian government was weak, under-resourced and under pressure. Similarly, civil society and community structures had broken down during the war, leaving a vacuum for external agencies in terms of who to work with as institutional partners. These represent fundamental issues for international agencies. If they engage in direct service delivery, do they run the risk of creating parallel structures that are not sustainable? Or do they become an alternative channel for donor aid which risks undermining the development and authority of a state structure? Save the Children maintains the flexibility to engage in short-term service delivery only as required by the context. At the outset of the former child soldier programme, it was paramount for Save the Children to retain an independent and neutral position, because of the sensitivities in working with military factions, and links with government were kept to a minimum. Only as the programme became increasingly concerned with education, did it become important for Save the Children to develop stronger links with relevant government departments, to ensure complementarity with state education systems, and local communities. This also raised the question of sustainability - if the programme was to

engage in “*catch up*” education and extend to community children, then strategies for making links with government programmes and sustaining children's involvement would now need to be explored.

How did the programme start?

Save the Children first began working directly with child soldiers in June 1996 through an unplanned initiative with a small group of 22 boys who had been demobilised in a one off demobilisation and stranded without assistance. The boys had settled in Virginia, a settlement just outside the capital Monrovia. Growing tensions between the local community and the boys, fuelled by their aggressive behaviour, resulted in a radio appeal to which Save the Children responded. Because of the pressing needs of the children, Save the Children began to work closely with them, and in July 1996 established a transit centre in Virginia, to provide the ex-combatants with shelter and protection while their details were taken and family tracing activities initiated.

Once Save the Children became involved, staff explored ways to fill the boys' days, starting with an emphasis on recreation and sport and the introduction of small tasks. The combination of a more structured, caring environment and an opportunity to channel energies on team sport rather than violence helped the boys to modify their behaviour, becoming more collaborative, and building up their self esteem.

Over time, activities became more systematised and the boys were offered several options: farming, learning to read and write, or training in handicrafts such as stool making. Classes were held daily and the boys were encouraged to try different activities and find their own skills and preference. The voluntary literacy classes, which developed without any formalised curriculum, soon sowed the seeds of achievement. The teachers were largely drawn from neighbouring communities, selected more for their personal qualities in dealing with a potentially confrontation situation than for their formal teaching skills⁹.

The majority of boys had had their education dramatically cut short by the onset of war and were desperate to resume their schooling as a priority. The boys often collected together any scrap paper they could find and Save the Children encouraged their initiative by providing exercise books, paper, pencils, colouring crayons and easy-to-read books. For many, the literacy classes provided a new-found confidence in their ability and a positive attitude towards education:

I will never be a soldier again. I want to go to school (but my mother is too poor. I want to be a productive farmer)... I want to attain college level in agriculture' Papa, ex-child fighter aged 16 years.

'I want to go to school through all my life' Junior, ex-child fighter aged 15 year ¹⁰

Subsequently “*catch up*” classes became the central pillar of daily activities in Virginia transit camp. These were developed to provide longer, more intensive learning once it became evident that family tracing could potentially take months and that boys would benefit from more sustained educational input. What originally began as a recreational, rehabilitative and largely non-formal exercise, evolved into a more formalized education programme. This programme informed Save the Children's later involvement with children in the demobilisation process, providing a model for further activities in the new transit centres which were established.

Extending the programme

Save the Children became one of the key international agencies in Liberia responsible for the tracing and reunification of all child soldiers during demobilisation and was instrumental in ensuring that children going through the demobilisation process were dealt with as children and not just another fighter. Building on the success of the Virginia Transit Centre, a total of four more transit centres were opened in central and northern Liberia to support this tracing work (Gbargna and Voinjama established in November 1996 at the start of demobilisation, Zwedru in July 1997, and Greenville in January 1998). The mandate of these centres was to offer a safe and secure environment for ex-child soldiers and provide shelter, food, medicine and clothing as they waited for their families to be traced.

Of the 4300 children demobilised, 700 opted to pass through the transit centre process between 1996 and the end of 1998. The number of boys at the original Virginia Transit Centre increased dramatically between November 1996 and February 1997 as a result of the country-wide demobilisation of fighters. Child fighters demobilised in the capital Monrovia, or whose families were believed to still be in Monrovia were sent to Virginia from the other sites.

The process of family tracing proved more complex than originally anticipated. Over half the children knew the whereabouts of their family and were successfully reunited within a month. For the others, tracing their family was complicated by the length of separation and displacement and could take over 6 months. However, by the end of 1995 over 90% of the child soldiers from the centres were successfully reunited with their family¹¹.

Creating links between former child soldiers and community children

The participation of community children in education activities happened

spontaneously in the Virginia centre. Extending educational activities to community children has now been prioritized in all subsequent transit centres to encourage:

- equity in access to services
- links between child soldiers and their civilian counterparts
- links between the centres and the wider community in which they are located.

This emphasis on inclusion has proved critical for effective reconciliation and rehabilitation of former soldiers to civilian life. While child soldiers do have very specific needs, not least the right to ***catch up*** developmentally and educationally, it is important to recognize that community and displaced children are in a similar situation and not to be seen to “reward” those who were active combatants.

Box 2: “The Virginia Boys”

In June 1996, 22 ex- fighters aged between 10 and 17 were found at the site of an old school for the blind in Virginia, close to Monrovia. These boys had been looked after by the Children's Assistance Programme (CAP), a local agency responsible for assisting former child combatants, until CAP's resources had dried up.

When Save the Children staff first discovered the boys, they were living in unsanitary conditions and organising themselves according to the hierarchical military structure to which they had adapted during the war. Most were armed with knives and homemade weapons and demonstrated aggressive and violent behaviour. Their relationship with the local community was strained, particularly as the boys had resorted to stealing crops and animals to survive, prompting the community to arm themselves against the former soldiers. Occasionally the tension between the children and the local community would erupt into violence.

Joseph Kpukuyu, a local Save the Children social worker, attempted to build up a rapport with the boys and gradually reconcile them with the local community. Provision of food paved the way to developing trust and relations. To counteract the feelings of depression, confusion and lack of purpose felt by the boys, Joseph began allocating them small tasks, as he put it, “to put some structure into these boys' lives”. Play and sport became a principal part of the boys' day, to both allow them to let off steam and motivate them to achieve as a team on an equal footing.

Joseph and his colleagues continued to build up closer relationships with the boys and encouraged productive activities to help them overcome their feelings of aggression and apathy. As a result, the boys' self-confidence gradually improved and they became less violent towards each other. Together with Save the Children staff, the

boys soon began establishing basic ground rules about their behaviour and their responsibilities towards their living conditions. Punishment for breaking established rules was swift, and boys who misbehaved were given strict chores to carry out. This overall approach, aimed at instilling a sense of self-worth coupled with individual responsibility, became known as the “tough love” approach.

Joseph began to work at providing the boys with an opportunity to explore their own potential. As one member of staff described:

At the very beginning it was about people who had concentration spans of 3 minutes. The first three weeks were just singing and hand-clapping, gardening, woodwork and very little structure. Basically, full time entertainment of those kids and engaging them in a process of learning that was fun, but also catering to the fact that they couldn't stay still. The first education in Virginia was in the open, kids would walk up and stay for half an hour, then wander off. We had to make it interesting through lots of competition and so on. Then at one point in woodwork the children made chairs that they could sit on in classes - this had a real psychological effect: having a little stool to sit on that they had made themselves'

Family tracing can be a lengthy process. Staff at the centre constantly talked with the children about what they might expect on their return home and aimed to reflect the community environment as much as possible to prepare the children for a smoother transition to civil society. As part of this approach, each member of staff acted as a surrogate parent to a small group of 6-8 children. The children and staff came together in these small family-style units for a few hours weekly to talk, discuss any problems in the groups and support one another.

When the first centre opened, staff observed that ex-child soldiers seemed to like being with babies and younger children; they appeared to enjoy having someone to look after. This meant that they would often look after children from families in the displaced camps and the local community, and bring them into the centre. The relationships which developed between the ex-combatant children and other local children provided the local community with useful exposure to the activities of the centre and the kind of education being provided.

Over time, an increasing number of both boys and girls from the neighbouring displaced camps and local communities began to attend the education classes held at the centre. There are several likely reasons for this. Firstly, like the ex-combatants, they had missed out on education during the years of conflict and the **catch up** approach seemed to respond to their educational needs. Also, even where returning to school was

not practically impossible for older children, the prospect sitting in classes with much younger children was a real disincentive. The curriculum developed at the centres was sensitive to this fact, and allowed children of broadly similar ages and education levels to work together. In addition, many of the children who attended the classes had no other possibility of going to school. The displaced camps lacked basic services, including schools, while few families could afford to send their children to school in the local community.

The activities pioneered in Virginia were subsequently replicated in all centres and the approach adapted to involve community children from the outset. Staff were responsible for deciding when and how to bring local children into the programme. All were conscious of the need to a) avoid setting up a parallel system and attracting community children away from local schools b) prepare both community and ex-child, whenever possible, to be reintegrated into the formal programme. Because demand for education significantly out-stripped supply, the transit centres tended to attract those children who were currently out of schools. In cases where community children had recently dropped out of local schools, staff would generally assess the reasons for this before accepting them into the classes.

The involvement of community children also brought the ex-soldiers, all boys in the case of the Save the Children centres, into contact with girls in a natural setting - of the community children, nearly half were girls, reflecting the particular needs of girls in the community for educational support.

Analyses of educational performance in two centres revealed that the educational levels of both ex-child soldiers and community children were well-matched, and that mixed classes were an effective mechanism for re-establishing links between ex-combatant youths and the wider community by breaking down the barriers of fear and suspicion, and promoting mutual understanding ¹².

ⁱ For the sake of brevity, the term 'community children' will be used to describe children outside transit centres, either from displaced camps or from the local communities.

Box 3: How catch up education can benefit former child soldiers

Levi Morgan is 18 years old. He fought for the Liberia Peace Council (LPC). Levi was 10 years old in 1990, a 1st grade student. In 1997, he was brought to the Zwendru Centre to await tracing and reunification. He enrolled in the literacy classes at the centre.

In late 1997 he completed the advanced classes. The teachers recommended that Levi enrol in a community school to continue his education.

Levi now attends the J. C. Borlee Elementary in Zwendru Grand County. He is in the 6th grade and performs well in all his lessons.

In about one year Levi was able to *catch up* and perform on par with the other children in his class who did not participate in the conflict as combatants.

As a short-term incentive to encourage achievement and enable ex-soldiers who performed well in the catch up programme to continue their education after family reunification, Save the Children extended school fee support to ex-child soldiers. This support was based on vulnerability assessments made by family tracing staff which identified families too poor to send their children to government schools - in the 1997/98 school year, 16 reunified children received funding.

The successful reunification of ex-combatants with their families led to a gradual shift in the ratio of ex-child soldiers to community children. At the beginning the latter outnumbered the former while by August 1998, community children enrolment exceeded ex child soldiers enrolment at a ratio of 4 to 1.

The growing involvement of community children in the transit centre *catch up* education programme gave rise to new concerns. Although the programme was primarily designed for 14 to 18 year olds, children as young as ten were attending the classes, and children as young as five had to be turned away. Further concerns were that the children attending Save the Children classes may not be among the poorest or most vulnerable in the community, and the risk of growing dependency by the community on what was intended as a short-term measure.

The high demand for catch up education confirms the need for relevant and free education and the limitations of state provision in the post-war period. It also raises the wider issues of sustainability and the dearth of resources at all levels (family, community, government), which is impeding effective development of the education sector.

Box 4: Children Attending the Catch-up Education Programme

In summary, the ex-child soldiers and community children attending the catch *up* programme fell into one of three categories:

- Over-age children with some prior education. Some of these may transfer to formal education, however, those who are older are unlikely to continue formal education as they experience the pressures (principally economic) of adulthood.
- Over-age children without prior education who have the opportunity to learn some basic literacy. Their prospects for continuing in formal education are limited.
- Younger children who learn basic literacy/upgrade their levels and re-integrated into the formal system at the correct age. These children are the most likely to continue with formal education.

Making the Curriculum More Relevant

The programme has been modified on an ongoing basis to suit children's particular needs. After the first seven months, it became clear that the education curriculum should be redesigned. This was due in part to the increased involvement of community children, as well as to the growing number of longer staying ex child soldiers. Liberia's national curriculum, intended for use in a formal education system covering many years, was too broad, traditional and irrelevant for the ex child soldiers. Although eager to learn, the curriculum was neither adapted to the low attention spans of ex-combatants, nor to their interests and experience. Further constraints to its application included the range of abilities and interests of ex fighters. Those under 15 years of age generally wanted to catch up from where they left off when the war broke out, while the older boys were interested in learning vocational skills.

To address these problems, Save the Children recognised the need to move into *catch up* education provision. It was at this point that collaboration with the Ministry of Education started, to look at ways of complementing their process of developing an 'Enrichment Curriculum'. This “enrichment curriculum” was designed to meet the accelerated learning needs of both ex child soldiers and other children who had missed out on education to facilitate their integration to the formal system, thus dovetailing closely with the approach developed at the transit centres.

The curriculum at the transit centres evolved progressively to meet the changing needs of the children. Initially a revised curriculum of six weeks was developed, fitting the average stay of children at the transit centres. This was followed by two successive phases of curriculum development, offering an education relevant to the children's particular needs and, where possible, preparing them to slot into the formal education system. The Beginners level offered basic literacy training (up to primary grade 3) for older children. The Advanced level provided more intensive instruction for those children who had already reached a higher level of education (3rd grade of primary), offering lessons in maths, science, social studies, literature and arts. Subsequently, it became clear that a fuller and longer curriculum would be required. Workshops were conducted at all the centres, resulting in a new six month curriculum on a modular design. This revised curriculum again fitted the circumstances of the children in the centres, mainly community children or former soldiers whose families were hardest to trace. It compressed the six year primary curriculum into two six month cycles, and so provided a coherent package of “*catch up*” education, with literacy at its core.

The six month curriculum was developed to complement the national accelerated learning curriculum and has been officially approved by the Division of Curriculum. The “pilot” nature of the experience has been especially useful in the Liberian context of reconstruction, offering practical lessons to inform thinking about curriculum design.

Introducing More Appropriate Teaching Methods

Appropriate teaching methods were crucial to the success of the programme. A total of 11 three day training and refresher workshops were conducted over a one year period. Topics discussed at the workshops included classroom management, lesson planning, instructional methods, and active learning approaches. The teachers were encouraged to blend a comfortable atmosphere conducive to learning with activity-based lessons. Activities such as drama, role playing, singing and field trips were added to encourage collective and individual participation. Teachers were regularly consulted about their work and the appropriateness of the curricula. In general, teachers found the six month curriculum easy to teach, although its effectiveness was limited by a lack of supporting materials, a challenge facing all levels of education in Liberia.

Links with the Formal Education System

The rationale behind the development of a *catch up* education programme was to offer children the chance of a basic education as well as allow children to move back into formal education at the right class for their age group. In order to achieve these goals it was essential that the *catch up* curriculum was complementary to the government curriculum, and recognised by the Ministry of Education. In this way, the *catch up* course provides children with an education which is nationally recognized, even where

they are unable to continue schooling in the formal sector.

Parallel Vocational Activities

Skills training in areas such as carpentry and agriculture ran in parallel to the *catch up* education programme. Many of the older children, aged 15 or over, were only taught basic reading, writing and arithmetic, as they were more interested in learning practical vocational skills which they could use to support themselves in the future. In some cases apprenticeships were offered on a case by case basis to some of the older children of 17 and 18 years of age who were keen to learn a trade. Formal links to the employment sector were beyond the scope of the transit centre programme, however, and apprenticeships with local carpenters, mechanics, tailors, and blacksmith normally took place when children were back with their families and communities.

The need for consistent monitoring and appropriate development of vocational skills training was recognised by staff working in transit centres.

What has been learnt?

The Liberia case study demonstrates the value of educational programmes in post-conflict situations, both in improving the life opportunities of children affected by war and in supporting the process of reconciliation at the community level. The experience in Liberia also underlines that, paradoxically, the most challenging situations can sometimes present opportunities for innovation. Although we have explored here an approach designed to meet the needs of a very specific group - former child soldiers - it also offers lessons about ways of working that are of wider relevance.

Being responsive

Innovation, flexibility and responsiveness have been the key factors contributing to the success of this programme. A culture of responsiveness was established from the outset, building up communication with ex child soldiers in Virginia in order to identify their needs and seek ways of meeting those needs. Had the programme relied on a carefully structured plan in the early stages, it might not have been possible to introduce the small-scale, innovative approaches which were tested and adapted over time, including the catch-up education programme and the inclusion of boys and girls from the local community in educational and recreational activities.

An integrated approach, combining provision of shelter and food with a daily structure and constructive activities, has created an environment in which ex-combatant children have been able to re-establish trusting relationships and develop self-confidence and positive relationships in society. The lessons and activities were adapted in response to

the changing situation of the children, evolving from recreational/constructive play activities, through literacy and basic education provision, to a *catch up* education programme which would serve the needs of ex child soldiers in the transit centres and the growing numbers of children coming in to the centres from the surrounding communities.

The role of education in post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation

As in other case examples from Lebanon and Mozambique, Save the Children's experience in Liberia illustrates the role of education in recovery after conflict for individual children and their communities.

School activities were intended to develop the former child soldiers' abilities to express themselves, to co-operate with one another and to socialise. They also sought to rebuild children's self-esteem through developing new skills and recognising their achievements. Learning practical skills, literacy and numeracy opened up the possibility for the children to take on new roles in civilian life. Activities in school also brought together the former soldiers with other children from the local community, enabling them to learn about each other's needs and to begin to work together to solve their problems.

Taking opportunities

Because of the responsive nature of the programme, it was possible to take advantage of opportunities that arose. As the programme in the transit centres developed, children from the outside community began to come into the centre to take advantage of the educational activities taking place there. This gave an opportunity for ex child combatants to mix with the local community, breaking down the barriers of fear and suspicion, and building up relationships of trust.

The extreme situation required urgent, flexible and creative responses. Children needed an effective education that responded to their immediate needs (e.g. dealing with their aggression and the trauma they had experienced) and to their long term needs (developing basic skills needed to secure opportunities in the future). International and local staff had to start from where the children were: this required child-centred approaches that were locally adapted.

Inclusive programming

This case study demonstrates the problems and contradictions of targeting programmes at an identified, vulnerable group. The original aim of the programme was to target ex-child soldiers, in the context of demobilisation; the subsequent inclusion of community

children had not been planned, but was encouraged by the project initiators in the interests of reconciliation and reintegration.

In this situation, Save the Children faced a dilemma: how could they respond to the needs of ex child soldiers, in the interests both of their individual rights and of wider social stability, without being seen to reward those responsible for the atrocities of war? The enthusiasm of community children to join the programme reflected that they, as well as the ex child soldiers, were in desperate need of basic and *catch up* educational opportunities which were either unavailable or unaccessible through the formal school sector. In fact, it can be argued that had these children *not* been included, the existence of educational facilities for ex child soldiers in the centres might have further damaged relations between these young people and the wider community by building up resentment and envy.

With this dilemma in mind, it is also important to note that in this case, as in many others, donor funding was available specifically for the rehabilitation of child soldiers, and the inclusion of children from the wider community presented a potential problem in terms of accountability to the donors.

Sustainability

From the outset, the focus of the programme was on short-term interventions with demobilised youth, and sustainability was seen in terms of the long-term benefits of reintegration of ex child soldiers into the community and reunification with their families.¹³ Financial sustainability only became an issue as catch up education and the involvement of community children gained in importance within the overall programme.

The child-focused methods that were developed were both innovative and effective: they provided an opportunity to influence the curriculum and practice in the state sector. Save the Children looked at ways of working with the Ministry of Education to achieve this, but this was not seen as priority. This was largely because of the need to maintain neutrality and the chaotic state of the official education system: there were few structures within which to work. However, the catch-up curriculum was shared with and taken forward by other agencies working in Liberia. Additionally, the child-focused approaches developed in the programme will be used by practitioners in their future work.

Editors' Conclusions

- A flexible and responsive intervention in one area (reunifying ex-fighters with their families) led to innovations in others. The result here was a new way of responding to the educational needs of demobilised child soldiers and ultimately of reintegrating them into society.
- The extreme situation of ex-child soldiers demonstrated particularly stark examples of the universal need for education to be responsive to children's background and needs. For example, a traditional approach to education would have no way to cope with children whose attention span is 3 minutes.
- Significant similarities in educational problems faced both ex-soldiers and civilian children - such as displacement, trauma, collapse of the school system. This made possible an integrated approach to educating ex-fighters alongside children from the community, which in turn helped the re-integration process.
- The catch-up approach to education responded well to the needs of displaced non-combattant children, particularly where their only other option would be sitting in class with much younger children. However, little attention was paid to the problems that this created: local children came to depend on a school that had only been intended to run short-term.
- There was always a tension between maintaining neutrality (and hence limiting partnership with the government) and seeking to ensure complementarity between catch-up education and the formal education system.
- The experience of providing catch-up education enabled Save the Children later to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education, to develop an “Enrichment Curriculum” to bridge the gap experienced by all children who had missed out on classes through war.
- Successes remain vulnerable to further conflict.

Notes

¹ Save the Children 1999. 'Liberia Emergency Update Five'. Internal report, Save the Children

² See also for example Selleck, P, 1998. *Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Save the Children Alliance & UNICEF, Afghanistan

³ Colenso, P, 1998. 'Liberia: the role of basic education in rehabilitation, reintegration and reconciliation in a post-conflict situation'. Internal report, Save the Children, Liberia

⁴ Save the Children 1999

⁵ Schembri, G, 1997. 'Liberia's ex child Fighters - a narrative account of the work of Save the Children in Liberia'. Internal report, Save the Children

⁶ UNICEF 1999. *State of the World's Children*. London

⁷ Allen, R., Colenso, P, 1998. 'Review of the educational component of Save the Children programme with ex-child combatants in Liberia'. Internal report, Save the Children

⁸ Schembri 1997

⁹ Allen and Colenso 1998

¹⁰ Schembri 1997

¹¹ Allen and Colenso 1998; also for examples in boxes 3 and 4

¹² Allen, R, undated. 'A news organ developed with the centre children'. Internal report. Save the Children, Liberia

¹³ Even in this respect it is difficult to be sure how long term are the effects. In early 1999 when the war had broken out again, one of the ex-patriate researchers for this case study was caught up in fighting and taken hostage by a group of militia. Among them was one of the young men who had been at Virginia camp at the time of the programme review on which this case study is based. When asked why he had returned to a life of violence, he responded simply that 'I am accepted here.'

The aftermath of conflict - New tasks with few resources - A case study from Mozambique



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What are the problems for children?

Changes in Government and Education Policy

After some 16 years of war, changing world events allowed Mozambique to find peace in 1992. A classic pawn country in the cold war struggle and critical “frontline” state with South Africa, the end of the fighting left a devastated infrastructure, a huge unsettled population and critical skills shortages in almost every walk of life. In terms of GDP per capita, Mozambique is the poorest country in Southern Africa (GDP/capita US\$ 100 per year) with 60% of the population currently living below the absolute poverty line.

The Government elected in 1993 was led by Frelimo, who held the Presidency and a parliamentary majority. Frelimo quickly had to learn to replace its Marxist doctrines with those appropriate to the country's perilous state within the world's new socio-

political arena. Big donor influence ushered in structural adjustment and decentralisation, while the free market economy gradually gained ground under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In terms of capacity and priorities, almost 20 years on since independence Mozambique found itself in a very similar position: limited capacity on the part of government and an urgent need for rebuilding both infrastructure and essential services.

A legacy of the civil war is that advances made in education provision during the 80s have largely been eroded. The expanded state primary education system has contracted due in part to heavy depopulation of rural areas but also to the targeting for attack of schools and teachers as sole representatives of the government in rural areas. Not surprisingly primary enrolment plummeted from around 75% to 40% between 1981 and 1992 and the education system continues to be dominated by serious problems of access and quality, and lack of human and material resources:

- less than 2% of children of school-going age complete 8 grades of schooling
- spending on teaching and learning materials amounts to less than US\$1 per student per year and there is a critical shortage of basic text books
- teacher morale is low due to heavy workloads, poor working conditions and low and erratic salary payments
- the language of instruction remains Portuguese, the language of the elite and inaccessible to most of children.

Throughout the war years, opportunities for international agencies to support the government were limited. With peace came the priority to rehabilitate the country both to rebuild after the destruction and to provide communities with tangible evidence of improved political stability. Additional resources were urgently required to boost the government's limited capacity and international agencies were encouraged to work in partnership with the government to fill the gap and speed up the process. In education there was a major drive to rebuild and equip schools as communities began to return home and rebuild their lives. The government launched a national programme of school construction and furnishing as the focus for international assistance to the education sector. Initially there was minimal co-ordination of donor inputs but as government capacity has expanded there has been a shift in approach reflected in new initiatives for co-ordination.

Trends in Donor Policy

After the 1993 elections, donors and international NGOs had an almost free rein in the move to rebuild the physical infrastructure of essential services and the economy. The country became inundated with new organisations, all developing their own strategies for presentation to Mozambican partners. This gave rise to a number of problems common to other countries where donors make a substantial contribution to the national budget. On the one hand government setting of national priorities, such as the school construction programme, influenced the approaches and nature of support open to international agencies. However, on the other, these agencies, in particular the larger multi and bi-laterals, were able to increase their influence in the country in relation to their level of input and policy priorities. A further issue was fluidity of government policies. As a new government in the process of establishing itself, changes in government policy and priorities have been common, requiring constant review and flexibility in planning on the part of donors and International NGOs. In addition, where multi and bi-lateral donors and International NGOs have the government as a common partner, there is a tendency for confusion over the differences between how the players operate and what they can offer as development support.

Since late 1997, there have been moves to improve this situation as both the government of Mozambique and donors have given priority to making a reality of “better co-ordination”. The result has been the promotion of “sector wide approaches to programming” (SWAPS). Through 1999, these are to be tried in three sectors: education, health, agriculture and fisheries. The aim of the SWAPS is to channel the bulk of donor funding to the government at central level who will have responsibility for allocating funding to priorities in line with a national plan.

While the new approach is expected to bring many benefits, not least ensuring that International NGOs work within national priorities, there are also some risks. Perhaps the most notable is the need to ensure that the priorities of Mozambican civil society and the bulk of ordinary citizens are not overlooked as a result of a process that over-emphasises the role of the state in development. The new approach also has major implications for the funding of International NGOs who currently access funding from donors. Under the SWAP initiative, there is likely to be less direct International NGO funding in future from donors and International NGOs will be placed in the challenging position of having to work with government to create new mechanisms for International NGO funding that draw directly from government funding channels³.

The response

The early Save the Children programme and approach

Save the Children has been working in Zambezia Province, the country's most populous region, since the 1980s. The province is one of the most fertile and agriculturally

productive in the country but suffers from poor infrastructure and limited access to basic services. It has a predominantly young population and yet only approximately 30% of children of school going age attend school and of these only 30% complete the seven grades of primary education⁴.

Concentrating primarily on the health sector, Save the Children followed the traditional working style of the organisation throughout most of Africa: the provision of technical assistance to strengthen government capacity. Working with the Ministry of Health provided inroads to other ministries and in 1988, Save the Children started to support education activities at the request of the Provincial Directorate of Education. Initial involvement included distribution of teaching materials to schools which continued to function during the war, support to a programme of pre-school construction and equipment, and after peace was established, a new focus on special education and programmes for traumatised children.

As Save the Children diversified its activities, it began to review its working approach. During the period 1988-94, it was difficult for Save the Children to develop a clear strategy, partly because of the limited areas of work open to NGOs, but also because of the changing policies and priorities of government. The immediate post war dynamism in national reconstruction brought new opportunities for working with government which

Save the Children was well placed to explore on the basis of the relations and commitment to Zambezia Province established during the war period. Despite the rapidly changing environment in the post war years (1994 - 1998), Save the Children was able to initiate a process of internal prioritisation, giving a more strategic shape to its work in Mozambique.

The evolving Save the Children programme and approach

Alongside other agencies, Save the Children joined the national school construction programme, concentrating its efforts in Zambezia Province where over 75% of schools had been either completely or partially destroyed. Strategically it viewed this as an opportunity to strengthen relations with provincial education officials, to develop relations with local communities and to promote dialogue between the two.

At the end of 1994, Save the Children established two sub-offices in Morrumbala and Mopeia districts, both of which suffered total infrastructural destruction and years of war waged largely on civilians. The aim was to increase Save the Children involvement at community level and enable the organisation to improve its understanding of the major issues affecting children's lives. It was a difficult time to start “community development” programmes, on one hand because communities themselves were in flux

and there was considerable community distrust of external agencies, on the other because all contacts with communities were to be established through government channels and there were high expectations that government would provide for basic services and reconstruction. During this period, the government was keen to collaborate with international agencies as a means of building up its own capacity and being seen to deliver services to communities. By 1998, it was possible to talk of a shift in the way both governments and communities perceived their roles, brought on by a more realistic understanding of the practical constraints on government and recognition of the potential of communities to complement the efforts of government and assume greater responsibility and initiative for improving their lives.

Recognising this shift in attitudes, Save the Children involved both district education officials and community leaders in participatory assessment processes to determine what communities perceived as priorities and to promote new mechanisms for interaction and learning between the two groups. Education featured high on the list of the community as a whole and as the top priority for children. Most communities wanted children and young people to gain access to either a formal education or other learning opportunities and considered provision to be the responsibility of the government⁵.

Through further discussion with communities and government partners a way forward was agreed:

- to concentrate on school construction and the creation of school committees to build links with and between children, communities and education officials and strengthen local structures
- to support teacher training and introduce more child-centred learning methods
- to use these initiatives as an entry point for further education and development activities such as addressing the issue of education for girls

Taken together, this would help achieve the overall goal of improving both the quality of and access to education for disadvantaged groups and enable children to achieve their basic rights to education and personal development.

The schools construction programme and creation of school committees

This programme, through its sheer visual impact, has provided an important message of permanence and investment in the future. Between 1994-98, Save the Children rehabilitated or constructed a total of 32 schools with 71 classrooms in Mopeia and

Morrumbala districts. Running a double shift system, these schools have significantly increased access to schooling in the area.

Although school construction is in itself a standard international NGO activity, in Mozambique Save the Children has been able to use it as a focus for getting government officials and communities to work in collaboration. Prior to Save the Children's involvement in the project, only private companies on government contract were allowed to build schools. Once Save the Children had built up the trust of the official civil construction department and education officials, it sought to involve communities in the construction of schools in their area through the creation of school construction committees. Through this mechanism, communities started to have a greater say in how, where and who would build the schools and to take an active role in construction which led the authorities to recognise that communities can build conventionally constructed schools to a satisfactory standard. A practical spin off of community involvement in the construction of local schools is that communities tend to have a greater sense of ownership and participation in the subsequent running of the school. A drawback of this approach by which Save the Children provided payment for construction materials and work was that it created the impression that Save the Children had substantial funds available for infrastructure improvements.

On completion of the buildings, the construction committees have given way to school committees comprised of teachers, parents and local leaders. In most instances, these have started to meet regularly and to participate actively in the life of the school. Members act as the interface between parents, mediating in teacher's disputes and encouraging children to go to school. They are also beginning to solve problems that arise in relation to schooling and to recognise that they too have a responsibility for education provision. An example was observed by an Save the Children consultant who visited one of the education committees:

'The school opened this year. They face a lot of practical problems, but during meetings they find solutions to them. There is a group of children who live at the other side of the river. Normally they can cross the river, but during the floods in the rainy season, they do not come to school from January to April. The parents suggested two possible solutions: either to build a dormitory and let the children stay there during the rainy season, or to build an annex to the school on the other side of the river. Because it will be difficult to secure the dormitory, they think the best solution is that a teacher moves to the other side and that the parents there build a classroom annex⁶.'

Over time these committees have also provided a forum where school and increasingly other community issues can be discussed. The initiatives that have derived from this are covered under the next section.

Improving teacher training

The construction programme was complemented by a continuous programme of teacher training seminars at district level. This was developed to tackle the critical issue of what goes on in the new classrooms and how to improve teaching methods which are based on learning by rote and give little regard to what pupils actually learn and understand. The training component has concentrated on: up-grading teachers organisational and classroom skills; lesson planning and development; introducing a child-centred approach to teaching, enhancing teacher awareness of the needs of individuals and special needs groups.

A limitation of this approach is that the training programme was carried out by provincial education directorate trainers and followed the official syllabus. However, there was flexibility within it for Save the Children to incorporate topics relating to child rights focus. These have included sessions on child rights, gender, disability and HIV/AIDS and have provided valuable opportunities for breaking down adult assumptions and improving responsiveness to children's realities. The emphasis on gender stems from the fact that girls are less likely to enter and persist in school at all levels of the education system but that this disadvantage is reinforced in the early years (44% of children enrolling in primary grade one are girls of which only 39% complete to grade five nationally, falling to 37% in Zambezia⁷). The training sessions form part of a strategy to increase numbers of girl pupils and women teachers, and have been planned based on the reasons given by parents for the high drop out of girls, i.e. threat of sexual advances by boys and teachers, importance of their contribution to household and agriculture duties.

The approach to the HIV/AIDS issue provides a good illustration of the role an external agency can play in stimulating discussion and awareness of “tough” issues. Save the Children's initial attempts to raise the issue of HIV/Aids, especially in relation to children, were met with some resistance by provincial and district directorates. Sex education in government schools is a sensitive issue; it is not part of the primary school syllabus and adults generally believe that children are not sufficiently mature to understand or engage in sexual activity. However Save the Children staff felt this approach was not realistic given that most pupils in grades four and five are between thirteen and sixteen years of age and some may be starting to be sexually active. Through negotiation, it was agreed that Save the Children would initially introduce HIV/AIDS issues through a teacher training seminar, and then link this to sessions in selected schools and communities. Once children were involved in the discussion it became clear that they were aware of the issues and would benefit from greater understanding. In conversation with children during HIV/AIDS training sessions, children openly said they had witnessed family/friends die in the refugee camps from

AIDS-related illnesses and knew that transmission was sexual. Subsequent research into HIV/AIDS corroborated the observation that sexual activity starts at an early age, particularly for girls, and also found that while rates of increase are high, levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS are generally low⁸. A positive outcome was that Save the Children was encouraged to organise additional seminars for local government in the district capitals and HIV/AIDS and other wider issues such as gender and disability became formalised within the teacher training seminars of both districts. The exposure of children, teachers and communities to these issues led to a gradual extension of interest in the issues and requests for additional training have increased through the school committees.

Since Save the Children's initial involvement in teacher training, the Institute for Primary Teacher Training in Quelimane (IMAP) has been strengthened and now represents the best hope of improving the quality of teaching in Northern Mozambique. As a key partner within the department of primary education for teacher training projects, Save the Children is developing close collaborative links with IMAP on shared work priorities such as girl's education. This form of partnership is considered the most appropriate to ensure that NGO initiatives to work with primary age children are co-ordinated with developments in the state system and achieve maximum impact. There is however a long way to go before improvements in teaching style are reflected in the classroom and make a tangible impact to the quality of education on offer. Recent research into classroom teaching practices concludes that:

'...teaching in Mozambican primary schools is characterised by little...pupil participation in verbal exchanges or other classroom activities (the average probability is that an individual pupil will speak once every second day, most probably consisting of ready made sentences repeating the teacher or textbook, and will read aloud in the classroom on average for less than 1 minute, once in three weeks). If listening to the teacher is the dominant pupil activities, then the next one in importance is waiting.... the third is copying. The results confirm that teaching normally is routinized and demands a predominantly passive or reproductive participation by the pupils⁹.'

Improving co-ordination

From 1995 onwards, Save the Children became increasingly aware of the need for better co-ordination amongst the growing number of organisations working in the education sector. Discussions on the advantages of creating a provincial education forum under the aegis of the Provincial Director of Education have started to bring fruit.

Decentralisation is bringing some strong players to the Provincial Directorate of Education in Zambezia (DPEZ) although budgets remain wedge-shaped with the fat end at the central level. The further one moves along the chain, the more critical the situation becomes, until you reach the extreme situation of a teacher in rural primary school fresh from secondary school with no training and no materials, nowhere to live and no payment for three months. These constraints are now widely recognised at senior levels and the Provincial five year strategy does not make light of the grave situation which gives rise to optimism for the future.

In December 1998, the Provincial Director convened a first meeting of the key players in education in Zambezia to present the draft strategy. Participants were drawn from officials from the DPEZ, including heads and teachers from schools in Quelimane, the Provincial Director of Plans and Finance, heads of three private schools in Quelimane, representatives of UNICEF, Ibis, ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children. The document was presented as a draft for discussion and working groups discussed key issues that were fed back in plenary. Under these new conditions, working with a government that is taking important steps to improve collaboration and co-ordination offers new scope for future partnership. How much is down to policy and how much down to the flair of the individual Director remains to be seen. Moreover to what extent this “new” approach will result in practical and tangible benefits for Zambezia's children will be a key test¹⁰.

Challenges for the future

Mozambique is at a critical point in its development. Within the constraints of poverty, post conflict devastation, corruption and limited skills base, the government is proactively looking at how best to engage with the international community and use external assistance to the best advantage of the development of the country. After a period of relative free-for-all which allowed donors considerable space to set the development agenda, the government is working towards exerting their sovereignty by establishing a national development plan and co-ordinating international organisations to work within this. This presents a challenge for both government and external organisations. Will government have the human resources and systems to implement the process of co-ordination? Will international organisations have the flexibility to work within a national plan and put aside their own internal processes of prioritisation and implementation?

It raises particular challenges for international NGOs like Save the Children. If they are to remain government partners alongside major donors, how will government perceive their distinctive contribution, in the case of Save the Children their child rights focus, in relation to a comparatively low financial input? How will NGOs be able to relate to and reflect the views of civil society if government comes to dominate development actions? A further challenge is how NGOs are to secure funding if they come to be

perceived as competitors with government for funds under the new SWAP initiatives.

In facing these challenges, Save the Children drawing on lessons from its experience in the education sector and over the last couple of years has undertaken an extensive review of the effectiveness of its approach and strategies in Mozambique¹¹. This confirmed that Save the Children was slow to move from a more traditional style of support to government and seek out complementary opportunities for working with communities and playing a linking role between different levels of government and the communities they serve. For Save the Children to make a more significant contribution in education, it identified the need to develop a longer-term strategy and greater prioritisation of its inputs to improve the quality of education which remains the dominant problem as access is extending¹². Within the framework of the national policy context, Save the Children has consolidated its education programme and, as multi and bilateral donors have started to focus on school construction, is taking a more active role in promoting dialogue between communities and education officials.

SCF is now actively exploring ways of contributing to improvements in the quality of education by helping service providers, institutions and official structures involved in education provision to acquire a better understanding of the conditions of children's lives and adapt education programmes accordingly. This is being achieved in various ways:

- strengthening planning mechanisms within the Provincial Directorate of Education and at district levels
- improving co-ordination between the Provincial Education Department and agencies involved in supporting work on education in the province
- strengthening the school committees and links between schools, local communities and education officials
- strengthening teacher training through IMAP and other key partners with an emphasis on increasing understanding about children's rights
- undertaking micro research to provide education providers with more detailed information about issues of specific interest e.g. the work schedules, priorities and aspirations of girls and boys, why proportionately less girls attend school than boys etc.

As an international NGO that is working increasingly with government *and* communities, Save the Children has identified three ways in which it believes it can

make a distinctive contribution:

- Play an active role in strengthening emerging co-ordination processes and provide a conduit for information exchange between officials working at the central, provincial and district levels and between officials, local communities and school users.
- Build appropriate advocacy strategies on the basis of its practical programming experience. For example the work on promoting girls' education has been supported by a range of interventions with communities, teachers and district and provincial education departments and offers scope for more systematic and concerted advocacy initiatives.
- Promote exposure to external education experiences and current thinking on education and methods. This is especially important for a country that, through conflict, has been relatively isolated from the outside world and new developments. This exposure needs to extend to all level of stakeholders, from Save the Children's own staff to government officials and communities. Save the Children can build on its experience and connections in other countries to arrange exchange visits, secondments, trainings and other forms of learning that offer opportunities for gaining relevant practical knowledge from other contexts. In addition, Save the Children have recently appointed a regional education advisor (based initially in Mozambique) who will travel between programmes in the region with a remit to maximise learning and training around existing education activities in the Southern African region. Other initiatives will include documenting learning which can be shared more widely in country and externally, and developing closer links with other organisations involved in supporting the education sector.

What has been learnt?

The Mozambique case study highlights a number of important points about how an International NGO can work with government and how its working style can evolve in relation to internal and external changes to achieve improvements in the responsiveness of education to children's realities.

Working with government: the importance of commitment and trust

Relations of trust can only be developed over time and are essential in developing meaningful partnership. Evidence of long-term commitment therefore becomes a key

factor in building up trust especially in conditions of conflict. Save the Children's initial programme of technical support to provincial government in the health sector continued and diversified during the war years. This involvement provided a sound basis for Save the Children to extend its activities into the education sector, take an active role in reconstruction programmes and initiate dialogue with different levels of education officials on the benefits of involving community and children in the design and delivery of education

Support to government programmes as a catalyst for promoting community participation

Through support to the national programme of school construction, Save the Children was able to utilise the opportunity to explore ways of promoting wider community involvement in the programme and encouraging government officials to recognise the value of community and child involvement in making education provision more responsive to their needs.

On-going review of the national policy environment and adapting working strategies

In common with other post-conflict situations, the initial period of rehabilitation and reconstruction in Mozambique was characterised by regular changes in national policy as the government established itself and its development priorities. To be an effective partner in the education sector, Save the Children needed to monitor and review policies, identifying the constraints and opportunities which they offered and to assume a flexible and responsive approach in relation to its strategies for supporting the role of government and communities in education provision. A key lesson for Save the Children in analysing its experience in Mozambique is that the context in which programmes are implemented has a huge influence in the nature and type of programming choices available. Equally, the kinds of “internal choices” that organisations make about the programmes they wish to support are at least as important in determining the impact and effectiveness of a programme. In reviewing its contribution to the education sector over a ten year period, Save the Children has identified the importance of looking not only at what it has chosen to support, but, in making that choice, reflecting on what it has chosen not to do.

Making links between users and providers

In the future Save the Children plans to concentrate its efforts more actively in this area. Initial experience in promoting information exchange, dialogue and understanding between different levels of government and between government and communities and children has demonstrated scope for strengthening these connections to help make

education services more responsive to children's realities.

The working style of an international NGO

Save the Children's experience in Mozambique highlights the importance of flexibility in programming in order to be aware of the changing context, and to identify and support the actors that are best placed to improve education provision.

Building on its existing programme, Save the Children worked closely with national and local government in order to strengthen its capacity to provide basic education through financial support and the development of human resources. It facilitated links between government and community in order to identify educational needs and review roles and responsibilities in provision. As opportunities have arisen, Save the Children has experimented with ways of encouraging greater participation of community and children in this process.

Through its involvement in training programmes Save the Children has had a catalytic role in introducing child centred methodologies in order to improve the quality of basic education. At the same time, it has been possible to ensure the inclusion and tackling of other priority issues identified by Save the Children, including HIV/AIDS education, access of girls to education, disability awareness and responsiveness to special needs.

Save the Children's role as an international NGO has been important in the process of supporting improved education provision in post-war Mozambique, allowing it to draw on broad educational experience in different contexts, introducing methods such as participatory working approaches, and promoting connections and information sharing nationally and internationally, between government, community, donors and similar programmes in other countries.

Editors' Conclusions

- The case study emphasises the dangers of an outside agency prioritising partnership with government in the absence of a clear independent strategy.
- A costly school-building programme was undertaken, but with little impact on quality; this contrasts with the low-cost, high-impact innovations demonstrated in other contexts (such as in the Ethiopia case).
- Despite limited impact (covering 32 schools in two districts over five years), this approach raised expectations among local communities that the agency could not meet on an ongoing basis.

- However, the ownership of the schools-building programme by the school construction committees was a strong basis for later community participation in running schools, through school committees of teachers, parents and community leaders.
- Although teacher training has been identified as a priority to improve teaching quality, impact has so far been elusive with persistent traditional patterns of children being expected to listen, wait and copy.
- Learning from this, Save the Children has now developed clearer priorities to facilitate the authorities' understanding of the conditions of children's lives, and to adapt education programmes in response. This role will include strengthening planning and co-ordination, supporting school committees and information exchanges, as well as further investment in teacher training and research linked to advocacy.
- The government's new national education plans emphasise the role of the state. It will be important to balance this with advocacy to strengthen the role of communities in running their own schools.

Notes

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¹⁰ Rodber and Trivedy, 1999

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¹² Johannessen, 1998

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SECTION IV. PRESSURES FROM A GLOBAL ECONOMY

[Stitching or schooling? - Children and football stitching - A case study
from Pakistan](#)

['The mirror of change'* - Kindergartens in a rapidly changing society - A
case study from Mongolia](#)

The problem:

- A global economy leads to increased vulnerability
- Pakistan: historical dependence on world markets
- Mongolia: recent entry to the global market

The approach:

- Can schools contribute to reducing children's vulnerability?
- The Pakistan case
- The Mongolia case
- Partnerships to tackle complex problems
- Local analysis combined with international experience

THE PROBLEM:

Section 1 discussed the ways in which poverty and lack of educational opportunity interrelate, and highlighted the fact that economic vulnerability is created by large-scale forces -political, economic, environmental. The studies in this section are selected to give an insight into these processes through two cases of suddenly increased economic vulnerability, one affecting a district, and one a whole country. They give examples of how global trends affect children, and how this interacts with issues of school provision.

A global economy leads to increased vulnerability

As economic relations across the world are increasingly structured by the dominance of large, powerful, economies, there is an ever more obvious impact of external forces on what happens even in remote parts of poor countries. The framework of economic globalisation is a body of international agreements that has given greater freedom of operation to multinational companies but with a consequent loss of freedom for national governments to protect their economies against adverse terms of trade. There has been a similar loss of collective bargaining power by workers, since different parts of a production process are located in different countries and can be rapidly moved to take advantage of changing economic trends across countries. In the ethos of the global market, the aim of economic activity is to increase profits for companies; all other goals, such as national development, social advancement or protection against the effects of poverty, are secondary at best.

Children are the most vulnerable group in society and economically the most dependent. They are the most adversely affected at times of economic crisis. Adults having to work longer hours means less adequate care for young children. Loss of work for adults or diminishing value of what they can earn leads to an increase in child labour, and working children are even less protected against hazards and exploitation than adults. The trend to economic vulnerability manifests itself worldwide in more children malnourished, more children leaving home to find work, more children on the streets.

The very different political histories of the two studies highlights the fact that increased vulnerability is an issue both in countries with long standing economic dependence on the West, as well as those which have only recently entered the global market.

Pakistan: Historical dependence on world markets

The Pakistan case is typical of the situation in many poorer countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, whose economies have long been integrated into the western market economy. Trade patterns dating from colonial times have led to extreme forms of dependency on particular crops or exports, whose price is subject to fluctuations in the international market. This study illustrates the vulnerability that results from such over-specialisation. The Sialkot district in Pakistan produces the overwhelming majority of the world's league footballs and was thus highly vulnerable when an international decision that changed employment patterns. Many children were employed as football stitchers until consumer pressure led the international football industry to ban child labour.

Mongolia: Recent entry to the global market The Mongolia case describes a situation

typical in countries in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union (and, in a somewhat different form, in parts of East Asia.) Opinion-leaders in these countries have been persuaded that the free market system generates wealth and is a natural partner of democratic freedoms. It came as a shock when, almost universally, countries that moved into the global market in the 1990s experienced a rapid growth of an underclass of unemployed, or of people whose incomes could no longer support them. This was accompanied by all the attendant social problems with which western societies are familiar.

THE APPROACH

Because the causes of economic vulnerability are essentially external to the society, it is not within its government's power to prevent them. But national governments nevertheless have to react to the problems caused, and increased poverty among children has obvious knock-on effects for education. The case studies give examples where an international NGO has attempted to support national and local education providers, together with vulnerable communities, to respond to these challenges.

Can schools contribute to reducing children's vulnerability?

In both cases Save the Children became involved because it was clear that international pressures had caused sudden vulnerability to children. Its concern was

- to work with local partners to reduce children's vulnerability where possible,
- to ensure that children's views were taken into account in whatever policies were being proposed,
- to press for policies and practice that were not narrowly sectoral but took account of the whole condition of children's lives.

In neither case was there a prior decision to work on issues of schooling. This emerged as a potential mechanism for reducing young children's vulnerability after a period of engaging with the broader issues, and learning to understand the particular problems and possibilities of that situation.

While approaching poverty issues via education is one important strategy, it is only one, and it is important not to seem to claim too much for it. Improving schools will not change the underlying and continuing causes of vulnerability. And where schools are very ineffective and inappropriate to children's real needs, they would have to be massively improved to bring about any real change in life chances for the children who

go through them. Nevertheless, in both cases Save the Children has been able to contribute to the development of policies and practice which offer some protection to children against the worst effects of the economic pressures. To do this it was necessary to consider:

- How poverty, child work and non-attendance at school interrelate.
- What school systems can do to prevent vulnerability, to diminish its ill effects, or to offer alternative futures to children.
- How school systems need to change in order to respond to changes in society.
- Whether school providers are equipped with the skills it will take to make these changes.

The Pakistan case

The ban on child labour in the football industry in Sialkot called into being a partnership of multi-national companies, government, local and international agencies. Save the Children joined this partnership to contribute its understanding of child labour issues in other countries, and to press for a programme that would take account of children's needs for both earning opportunities and schooling. Through asking children for their views it was able to challenge assumptions among decision makers about the relationship of child labour to school going, for it became clear that low quality of schooling rather than work was a primary reason for non-attendance. From experience in Bangladesh Save the Children argued that a ban on child labour in one sector could lead children into other more hazardous forms of work, and successfully advocated for a progressive phase out rather than an immediate ban. The research findings became a key input in the design of a programme to build up alternative livelihood options and improved schooling.

The Mongolia case

The Mongolia study shows how an international NGO can draw on its understanding of international economic trends and their impact on children, to support more responsive policies at national government level. By working closely with the government during the critical period of rapid transition from a command to a market-based economy, Save the Children was able to strengthen government capacity to interpret and anticipate the impact of this transition, and to develop new strategies for pre-school provision to respond to changing external conditions.

Partnerships to tackle complex problems

Several themes run through both studies. One is that the complex nature of the challenges requires a style of working through a range of partnerships. The problems were clearly too broad to be effectively tackled by a narrow focus on education: it was necessary to make connections between school providers, communities, and other bodies that could affect what happened to children. And given the international issues involved it was essential in both cases to engage with the UN agencies, donors or multi-national companies who had a role in determining future policies.

- In Pakistan, Save the Children's decision to join the partnership that had been set up in the wake of the ban on child labour was seen by some as an unusual decision for an international NGO that had previously worked on education issues in Pakistan primarily at community level. The partnership included representatives from multi-nationals, local commercial interests, government, and UN agencies. It has attracted considerable attention because of the high profile nature of the industry, and provides a rare example of collaboration between what would normally be seen as disparate groups. Save the Children used its presence to bring into the partnership local NGOs that could contribute experience of livelihood and school issues. Together they were able to advocate for an approach which took account of all the demands on a child's life, and led to programmes that recognised the need to improve the quality of schooling. Potentially such a partnership provides a mechanism to press the corporations that drive economic changes to be more socially accountable to the communities they affect.
- The Mongolia study describes a role which involved liaison with many different groups. As one of the first international agencies in Mongolia, Save the Children adopted an explicitly low key approach, gradually building up relations of trust with government officials at different levels and identifying key people through whom to reach other levels. In the early stages it provided opportunities for decision makers to acquire new skills: to analyse the causal links between economic transition and poverty; to gain experience of participatory ways of tackling problems; and to define policy parameters within which international donor funding could operate. Save the Children also supported newly emerging groups of professionals who were taking on roles outside government, and in partnership with them initiated research into the impact of the economic changes on children. This was then used in problem analysis with officials. The context of rapid change also offered the opportunity to experiment with new ideas through a series of pilot projects to encourage community initiatives. The combination of these practical and analytical

experiences created a situation where there is a national commitment to preserve state-supported pre-school education, and a conception of how it can be used as a means to tackle increasing vulnerability of young children.

Local analysis combined with international experience

Another common feature is that in both of these cases Save the Children was a relatively new player. That it was nevertheless able to play a useful role was due to its philosophical approach and style of work:

- A belief in the need to retain diversity (see Section I)

The aim was to strengthen local stakeholders' ability to retain control of the direction of their own societies to the greatest extent possible, and to resist the negative impacts of economic globalisation.

- International experience

Save the Children staff in each country were in a position to contribute something of value to local decision makers because they had access to the international experience of the organisation, which had engaged with related problems elsewhere. They could share this understanding with local stakeholders, who had less access to relevant information, and less experience of negotiating with international bodies.

- Local analysis

Contributing an understanding of global issues did not mean presenting a 'global solution'. The programme approach evolved organically, responsive to what was culturally or politically possible, and support was given to local groups to find solutions appropriate to their context.

- Understanding what children experience In both cases documentation of children's experiences and views had a clear effect on policy, through challenging previously unquestioned assumptions.

Stitching or schooling? - Children and football stitching - A case study from

Pakistan



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What are the problems for children?

The Child Labour/Education Debate

Throughout the world, education and work during childhood are widely seen as incompatible. Work is generally viewed as preventing children obtaining an education; compulsory schooling then becomes the 'solution' to child labour. This view of education and work as opposites is common both in national and international policy-making and debates. It is based on stereotypes of both work and education, and draws on an image of work as a full-time activity undertaken between certain fixed hours, usually at a workplace away from the home. This is contrasted with education, often

seen entirely in terms of full-time school attendance. Of course, it is widely appreciated that meaningful education is much broader than school attendance. It is less commonly appreciated that children do an enormous range of work, by no means all of which prevents them accessing education. The majority is flexible, done for their families rather than for an external employer. In some contexts, working enables children to pay for parts of their education. In much of the world, work itself is considered an important part of education, enabling children to learn a valuable life skill. Rural children's work in agriculture, herding and domestic work in the Malian Sahel¹ and football stitching in Sialkot are good examples.

Furthermore, most children who work full-time and do not attend school do so because of poverty - their families cannot manage without their labour. Thus it is often not work that prevents children attending school but family poverty. Or as observed above the unattractiveness of education. It is probable that the kind of work that prevents children from accessing an education is the minority. However, it is this image of work that predominates in debates about child labour and education². Some of the pressure groups who raised the alarm about children's involvement in stitching footballs in Pakistan painted an inaccurate picture using images of children forced to work very long hours in factories, sometimes in order to pay back parents' debts, unable to obtain an education or to play. The intention was to 'give children back a childhood', taking them away from work and putting them into school, seen as the 'proper' place for children.

Why an international/local partnership was formed

The pressure groups against child labour in football production arose from "labour rights" campaigning groups who mobilised American mothers around concern that their children were playing with footballs produced with child labour. Using the leverage of consumer power, these pressure groups effectively targeted international companies such as Nike and Adidas sourcing footballs in Pakistan, and football industry-associations such as FIFA. By mid-1997, under growing international pressure, the football industry formed a partnership to eliminate child labour from the Pakistani football industry with a range of international and local organisations. The key partners initially were the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, representing manufacturers, the International Labour Organisation, UNICEF and Save the Children Fund (UK). Subsequently, a range of Pakistani NGOs and government departments joined the programme, implementing different components³.

Save the Children's main reason for entering the Sialkot partnership was to ensure that children displaced from football stitching would not be pushed into taking up other more hazardous or exploitative forms of work, as had happened when child labour was phased out of Bangladesh's garment industry. In this instance, the extent to which

households relied on children's earnings from the garment industry had been severely underestimated and the majority of children had thus taken up other kinds of work⁴. In the Sialkot case, mounting consumer pressure to raise awareness of child labour in football production in the run up to the 1998 Football World Cup presented such a threat to the profile and profits of international companies that they would only accept a ban on child labour. With the support of Pakistani manufacturing groups, Save the Children was able to advocate for a gradual phase out of child labour and a programme of education and livelihood options as a realistic response in a context where a ban was inevitable.

Drawing from the experience of Bangladesh, Save the Children stressed the crucial need for a situation analysis to gain a thorough understanding of children's involvement in football stitching and feed this into programme design. Once the analysis was undertaken, Save the Children drew local NGOs, known to have relevant experience, into the partnership. The local NGO Sudhaar became the main partner to work on programme development and implementation, bringing in first hand experience of programming with working children in the education sector in the Kasur region.

Realities of Education and Work in Sialkot

The situation analysis examined children's involvement in football stitching, the reasons why they work and their experiences of work and school⁵. Broadly the research revealed:

- ***Children stitch footballs to supplement family income and because it represents a better option to poor quality schooling***

While only twenty per cent of child football stitchers currently attended school, nearly two thirds had attended school in the past. Rather than football stitching preventing them from attending school, the majority had dropped out because their families needed their income or could not afford to pay schooling costs (fees, materials, and 'voluntary' contributions towards school upkeep), or because they saw work as a better option than poor quality schooling. Most of the children interviewed stitched footballs because their families needed the money. The situation analysis thus confirmed that Save the Children's initial concerns that children might be pushed into worse circumstances if they were banned from child labour were valid.

The analysis also reflects the wider national context. Although national statistics on education are notoriously inaccurate, it is clear that over half of school age children are out of school at any given time and that a high proportion of these are involved in some form of work, ranging from full-time employment to informal, home-based piece rate occupations and seasonal work which tends to get left out of government figures. With

such limited life chances, it is little wonder that work is seen to offer a more viable livelihood opportunity than basic education and certainly than continuing beyond primary school⁶.

Box 1: How football stitching can help school attendance

Twelve year old Asma is the oldest child in her family. She has two younger sisters, and all three girls go to school. Asma is in class seven. She earns about 240 Rupees per month stitching footballs. This helps to pay school expenses and allows her to have some money of her own. She is not skilled enough to stitch complete footballs, but helps her father and sometimes stitches half balls. Her father has been stitching footballs for twenty years and normally stitches three balls per day. With Asma's help, he can now produce four balls per day. If she is no longer allowed to stitch footballs, she thinks she will either do other home-based work or will study full-time. She would like to be a schoolteacher.

• *Football-stitching is a flexible and desirable form, of labour in relation to alternative work options*

The research also showed that children were not confined to one spot for long hours. Most children stitched footballs in their own homes in order to boost family production, and would intersperse this with other activities, such as agricultural work or household chores. This is not to say that they found football stitching unproblematic. Many of the children interviewed complained of eye strain and pain in their joints. They were, however, clear that football stitching was preferable to other work available to them in Sialkot, such as working in surgical instruments manufacture, in tea shops, agriculture or as domestics, and that work of some kind was a necessity.

The benefits of football stitching to the local economy of poor households is recognized nationally. It is well-adapted to the geography of small villages in the Sialkot areas because production can be home-based; because it can be done at home it is adapted to women who according to Muslim traditions are restricted to activities around the home and can combine it with domestic responsibilities, and helps prevent migration; it is relatively unhazardous; it does not require sophisticated methods of production and can be fitted around other commitments of workers which could include education activities. Neither the national economy, employers or employees want to lose this source of revenue.

• *Poor quality of education is a higher deterrent to enrolment than availability*

Children's school experiences were illuminating and contrasted with the benign image of education counterposed by campaigners to stitching footballs. The children

interviewed complained of being beaten, of teachers not coming to class, or not teaching when they did, and of having to work in the teachers' fields after school. For some children, schools were also inaccessible in the rainy season due to lack of bridges. It was striking, however, that most villages had both a girls and a boys primary school; absolute lack of primary schooling facilities was not the problem, as a number of the partners in the programme had initially assumed, though access to middle and high schools was much more limited, particularly for girls.

The problems with the education system experienced by the Sialkot children are common throughout the country. Pakistan is at the extremes of education league tables. It has one of the lowest literacy rates (38% according to official statistics⁷), one of the lowest GDP expenditures on education, currently running at 2%, and dismally low levels of enrolment and completion. Almost 50% of primary aged children have no access to school whilst almost 50% of those who do enrol, dropout. The situation is worse in rural areas, where 65% of the population live, and for girls, who represent less than half of enrolments for boys". The poor quality of education on offer, compounded by corruption, widespread teacher absenteeism and physical abuse of pupils is a key factor in whether children go to school or to work. It also explains the significant growth of private schools, particularly in urban areas, where parents who can afford to send their children in the belief that the quality of education is better.

The question has therefore become how to make education more attractive and relevant to children and improve household livelihood opportunities. Although Sialkot is a relatively better off part of Pakistan (where one might expect greater investment and thus higher quality education), the quality of education is uniformly low in spite of a reasonably high distribution of school infrastructure at village level.

The Response

The Sialkot education programme

Based on experience elsewhere in the world and on these research findings, Save the Children advocated the implementation of a programme that was developmental - that strove to improve the conditions of children's and families' lives in a sustainable manner. There are two main components to the Sialkot programme: the monitoring component that inspects workshops to verify that no children under 14 are involved in football production, and the social protection component which seeks to improve educational opportunities for children and to assist families to develop alternative sources of income. Save the Children, like the other NGO partners, is part of the social protection programme.

As the situation analysis revealed, enhancing household income is essential for children

to access improved educational opportunities¹⁰. Save the Children and partners are tackling this in two main ways: firstly, through a partnership with an NGO which provides credit and savings facilities to families of child football stitchers, as well as the wider community, in order that they can develop or improve small businesses and agriculture; and secondly through ensuring that the phasing out of child labour does not lead to women losing stitching jobs as well.

Box 2: Importance of women's employment in football stitching

In many households, women's income from football stitching is essential. Football stitching is an attractive job for women since it can be done at home and fitted around other chores. Thus women's reputations are not compromised by working outside the home, and they can combine paid work with other domestic duties. Football stitching also pays better than other home-based work, such as sewing cycle gloves. The move to centralise football stitching in a few large factories that could be easily monitored to ensure no children were present would have resulted in most women having to stop stitching footballs, and many households losing two or more incomes at once. Save the Children's engagement with companies both internationally and locally has therefore focused on the importance for children and families of ensuring that women's income is protected, and encouraging manufacturers to set up village-based units for women. Securing agreement that units of 3-4 women can be considered 'stitching centres' registered with the programme is an important breakthrough. Save the Children has also advocated, both in Pakistan and internationally, the importance of the sports goods industry paying higher wages, so that the need for children to work is reduced and eventually eliminated¹.

The Education Programme

The intention of the education programme is that education should be both a positive alternative to work for children phased out of football stitching, and a means of preventing children starting other forms of work. The programme is set up to work with the government run primary schools in areas where the concentration of stitcher families is 25% or higher. There are two main aspects to Save the Children's work on education: the first concentrates on enhancing community involvement in school management; the second on improving the quality of education through teacher training¹¹.

School Management Committees

Pakistan has for several years nominally had a system of school management committees, consisting of the head teacher, other teachers, parents and community leaders, mandated to ensure the effective running of village schools. However, in

practice these committees existed only on paper. Save the Children's partner for the education component, Sudhaar, is working with schools and communities to revive school management committees and to use them as a way of making education more attractive to children and families than entering the labour force. An effective mechanism it has found to achieve this revival is to encourage the participation of women on the committees. Formerly, even in the girls schools, the committees were primarily made up of men. In only a couple of months, women are starting to break with tradition and becoming active and regular members on the committees.

The school management committees are mobilising funds within villages for infrastructural improvements to schools; Save the Children has also been providing small grants to active school management committees to enable them to carry out these improvements. These include building walls or fences, building toilets, buying wood to construct benches or floor matting so that the children do not get so cold at school in the winter, making cemented blackboards and repairing broken handpumps so that schools have a water supply. All of these apparently minor issues in themselves can be the final straw that push children to drop out of school when they or their families feel that they are not learning anything useful. However, simply improving the school environment is insufficient to improve the quality of education which is commonly attributed to widespread teacher absenteeism and verbal and physical abuse of children by teachers. This is the other important aspect of Sudhaar's work in Sialkot and the committees have a role in this as monitors of what actually goes on in the classroom.

Teacher Training

Teacher training is the other main component of the programme. So far, training focusing on improving teachers' communication skills and improving teacher-student interaction has been provided to a small number of teachers and officials of the Punjab Department of Education. Unusually, the school management committees were involved in identifying training needs. Sudhaar is working to establish deeper linkages with the Department of Education, and with UNICEF, to develop a broader teacher training programme, which will eventually reach teachers in government schools throughout the district.

According to the first annual report of the programme, improvements in the attitude of teachers towards children are starting to be seen as a combined result of the committee organisation and teacher training. The common practice of physical and verbal ill-treatment of children is being tackled head-on in training modules and by the committees. A growing number of teachers have openly admitted to the use of violence for discipline and have committed never to use physical abuse as a means of discipline again. Similarly changes in teaching styles are being observed. In contrast to the traditional "chalk and talk from the front of the class" style of government teachers, teachers are increasingly seen to be engaging children more actively in the learning

process, by standing up and moving among students while taking classes.

A Developmental Approach to Education

Save the Children and Sudhaar's developmental approach to education in Sialkot contrasts with the prevailing NGO model in Pakistan (and elsewhere) which is one of 'rehabilitation', restoring child workers to a 'normal' childhood by taking them out of work and putting them into special schools. Whilst this may be appropriate for children who have had no education and are too old to join primary school classes, it is not necessarily the most appropriate solution in Sialkot, where many football stitchers have had some education, and are thus able to rejoin 'mainstream' classes. The strength of this model as a way to address child labour, and the degree of pressure on international companies and their suppliers to be seen to be acting quickly on the 'child labour problem', has resulted in several 'rehabilitative' schools being set up alongside government schools by companies and other NGOs in the programme.

'The issue is of relevance. Even if we take the working children out of football stitching, how would we be able to prevent new ones from joining the stitching industry? So we have tried to design our programme as a preventative mechanism rather than a rehabilitative one. We have also tried to hit the aggregate number of working children in all trades. Our component has to be understood in the context of the overall work done by various implementing agencies in the football industry of Sialkot. Its important linkage with the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry is to be recognised as well.' Bahar Ali, Project Manager, Save the Children Pakistan

Impact and Future Challenges

It is really too early to say what the project's impact has been in terms of changes in children's lives. Initial assessments point to an increase in school enrolment, an improvement in teaching styles and a dramatic fall in football stitching by children.

From the start, Save the Children has argued that the programme will only have been a success if it leads to sustainable improvements in the quality of life of child football stitchers and their families. Save the Children has therefore led the development of a system for monitoring the impact of the programme. At the time of writing, this has focused primarily on establishing basic data on school enrolment (which has increased) and changes in children's and families' occupations in a sample of households and villages throughout the district. The team now plans to develop ways of assessing what these changes mean for the children and families concerned, and to promote impact monitoring among the different partners in the programme. In addition to its value for the programme, this monitoring should enable analysis of the effectiveness of this approach to child labour issues.

The Sialkot programme is a flagship project for almost all the partners involved and is frequently presented as a model to be transferred to other areas and industries. It is an example of addressing child labour in a high profile industry and of working in partnership with the private sector, an increasing preoccupation of development organisations.

What has been learnt?

Improving education quality

The Sialkot programme and other studies in this book (Mali, Ethiopia, India) demonstrate how small inputs can help improve the quality of education and, in turn, the number of children attending school. Effective approaches include improving teaching/learning methodology through teacher training and increasing community participation in the identification of problems and solutions to school management and student enrolment issues. Where the Sialkot programme is weak is in tackling the substance of what children are learning and the structural problems at the root of an education system that persistently fails children. Any lasting changes in education quality would need to be backed up by a shift in political will to offset structural issues such as teacher absenteeism and corruption, and a change in the country's budgetary priorities. Piloting low-cost approaches that can be shown to improve teaching ability and promote community accountability and demand for education offer practical and potentially replicable ways of moving the process of change forward.

The contradictions of abolition

There is genuine incredulity in Sialkot that so much attention and resources have been devoted to phasing out child labour in what was seen by all as a relatively benign occupation, when children work in so many more hazardous occupations. In this context, phasing child labour out of football stitching was the only possible response to prevent a wholesale boycott of the Pakistani football industry, which would have had potentially disastrous consequences for families and communities as a whole, with a huge impact on children as a result. However, many observers believe that a better solution would have been to find ways in which children could attend improved schools, thus gaining the benefits of school education, while continuing to stitch part-time, thus learning useful skills for the future and making an immediate contribution to family income.

Adapting to the constraints of the operating environment

There is on-going debate about whether, from the outset, the project should have been broadened to address all forms of child labour in the district, rather than singling out

child workers in one occupation, thereby avoiding a situation where children may simply shift from one form of work to another. Given the enormous pressures on the football stitching industry, such an approach would have been difficult in this context, but where time pressures are less acute, a more holistic approach would probably be more effective.

Replicability: problems and challenges

The extent to which the Sialkot programme could be replicated is questionable. Given its flagship nature for all concerned, the project has attracted extensive donor funding. This is clearly not replicable. It is ironic that while development organisations view working with the private sector as a way to reduce unsustainable dependence on aid funds, and despite substantial contributions from the industry, in this case most expenditure on the Social Protection programme comes from donor funding. The challenge is to develop solutions to child labour that depend less on external funding, and which promote the involvement of children, families and communities concerned in the analysis of problems and development of solutions, so that issues of genuine local concern are addressed effectively.

The role of the international NGO

The Sialkot partnership is an important example of the growing trend to bring together stakeholders from the private, international and local sectors and to forge links that can help action at the international level become more responsive to local conditions. It has been especially effective in the Sialkot case as the partnership involves all key players: the government, manufacturers, and relevant international and local agencies.

This case study illustrates four ways in which an INGO can play a key linking role between the relevant international, national and local actors.

- ***Understanding local issues:*** working in partnership with local NGOs and groups has given Save the Children an insight into the situation of children in Pakistan based on the realities of their experience. This creates the legitimacy and credibility of Save the Children to advocate on behalf of children at both the national and international level and to commission research around the target issue of children stitching footballs.

- ***Wider perspective of issues such as child labour:*** as an international NGO working in a range of countries, Save the Children has built up a body of knowledge on specific issues, such as child labour or children in situations of conflict, which gives a broader perspective to localized issues. For example, Save the Children's advocacy on child labour is based on research and programme experience in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

- **Advocacy role:** the combination of understanding at the grassroots and a wider perspective allows Save the Children to advocate for children and encourage their direct representation in national and international policy-making. This has been especially valuable within the child labour debate, where Save the Children has taken a controversial position. In this case, Save the Children speaks out against bans on child labour where these would force children into more exploitative or hazardous work or would push them and their families further into poverty; and advocates for improved regulation and working conditions and against forms of labour which are exploitative and hazardous.

- **Acting as a bridge:** Save the Children operates at different points of a spectrum, working at the level of the international community, monitoring global and development assistance trends, as well as at the community level, supporting practical programme initiatives. This equips Save the Children to keep its partners abreast of changes in the international context and to act as a catalyst to bring different actors together, encourage dialogue and mutual understanding and explore new ways of working in partnership. This is a challenging role, which demands sensitivity to the different vested interests involved, and recognition of limitations of an international NGO's sphere of influence.

Editors' Conclusions

- In Sialkot, the need to work is not the only reason why children do not attend school. Save the Children's analysis, based on consulting communities and children themselves, demonstrated that the reasons include both family poverty and the dismal quality of the education available.
- In much of the world, work is seen as a valuable part of education, enabling children to learn essential life skills.
- Campaigning needs to be based on communities' own understanding of their situation and needs. The well-intentioned international ban on child labour in football stitching threatened to push children into more hazardous forms of labour without addressing their need for education.
- Save the Children combined practical initiatives to improve the quality of education at community level, with advocacy to create a better understanding of children's needs among the groups making decisions about their future. The advocacy ensured a gradual phase out of child labour, allowing time to develop alternative livelihood options.

- Small inputs from Save the Children are beginning to change teachers' attitudes and develop systems for community participation in education. Simply promoting the participation of women on school management committees, for example, is having a clear effect in making local schools more responsive to children's needs.
- Advocacy was successful only in minimising the immediate threats from the international ban: it was unable to address the structural problems at the root of an education system that persistently fails children.

Notes

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'The mirror of change'* - Kindergartens in a rapidly changing society - A case study from Mongolia

* 'Children are the mirror of the changes that Mongolian society has been experiencing.' Mandal Urtnasan



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What are the problems for children?

The effects of economic transition

Under globalisation, no country is free from external economic forces which impact directly on the lives of citizens and the ability of governments to provide effective services. This is especially true for the group of countries undergoing economic transition from a centrally planned to a market driven economic system of which Mongolia is a part. The speed and extent of change in Mongolia since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc has had a profound impact on the economy, political thinking, the daily lives of the population, family coping mechanisms and the ability of government to support the vulnerable.

With the sudden removal of the Soviet ideology and practical economic support on which Mongolia had depended for nearly seventy years, everything is on shifting ground, being questioned, under threat. While this offers new opportunities for greater national responsibility and policy-making, the inherited Soviet system is notoriously ill-adapted to keep pace with the rapid speed of change.

Box 1: A brief profile of Mongolia

- population of 2.5 million, of whom the majority are under 25;
- very sparsely inhabited, with the lowest global population density of 1.4 people per square km. 44% live in sparsely populated rural areas and 56% in the 3 main cities of Erdenet, Darhan and Ulaanbaatar;
- 15% of the population live a nomadic/semi nomadic life, moving gers (circular felt and wood tents) short distances 2 or 3 times a year;
- an extreme and hostile climate, ranging from -30C in winter to +30C in summer;
- a peaceful and stable country, whose last civil war was in the 1920's, and where the use of firearms is rare;
- although independent, from 1924 Mongolia was closely attached to the Soviet block which subsidised one third of its budget until 1991

The disintegration of the communist systems has hit children and vulnerable groups hardest. In addition to the loss of an annual subsidy from the former USSR of up to a third of GDP, Mongolia has suffered from the collapse of main trading partners and a dramatic drop in per capita GNP which, after 1991, fell from US\$ 1,600 to US\$ 463. Furthermore, structural adjustment policies needed to secure external loans have contributed to increased inequality and marginalisation in what was formerly a relatively equitable society. The immediate effects on most children are a rapid drop in family living standards as unemployment, falling wages, privatisation and disappearing subsidies have combined with drastic cuts in key public services, such as health and education, to deepen poverty and stretch family coping mechanisms to the limit¹.

'I have read a lot in the papers about what happened in Mongolia and in my society after the upheavals of 1989. Before there was political oppression in our country - I know that now but I didn't know it before. Now we are free - but the prices are so high that people become poor. That is because we have a market economy... we are a

*little people if we don't develop our production, we will disappear as a people. You can already see this in lots of places - there are many people in the streets who are very drunk. It wasn't like that before and it makes me afraid.'*²

'It's the only country in which I have worked that has not been at war. But take away the bullets and there is the same chaos. Market economics is a kind of undeclared war on children. The state is crumbling and families are in collapse - people are so poor here. Men shouldn't have to resort to the bottle as their only source of hope, and women shouldn't be left to shoulder all the responsibility of bringing up children. Family life is so difficult because basic conditions are so terrible.' John Beauclerk, Save the Children Programme Director

'Children are the mirror of the changes that Mongolian society has been experiencing. How their lives have changed and what prospects the market offers for them, could be argued, is the real measurement of the transition. What took Mongolia decades in improving conditions for children is now under the threat of being wiped away if urgent action is not undertaken.' Mandal Urtnasan, Save the Children Senior Project Officer³

The impact of transition on basic education

In common with other Soviet satellite countries, Mongolia enjoyed an extensive and well resourced education system under communism. The role of pre-school education within basic education services was particularly important in the case of Mongolia, where primary schooling does not formally start until age 8. This late start of primary education was due to harsh weather conditions and the isolation of many rural, pastoralist children, whose needs were addressed through a system of primary boarding schools. Mongolia therefore had an extensive kindergarten system modelled on Soviet lines, offering free day-care (including food) and education to the children of working parents (the majority of Mongolian women are employed).

Basic education provision before transition:

- education was well established in the communist era with an infrastructure of schools throughout the country
- the education sector received the largest share of government expenditure (17.6%)
- an adult literacy rate estimated at 93%

- enrolment of 98% at primary school level, with low levels of dropout
- Free boarding schools to ensure access for rural/nomadic children
- High levels of female participation: 54% at primary school level and more at higher levels

Basic education provision under transition:

- sudden and severe contraction of education resources: a reduction of 56% in education spending between 1990 and 1992
- capital investment halted and non-teaching staff reduced
- huge increases in heating costs leading to use of fewer classrooms and school closures in winter months
- parental contributions introduced for food and clothing
- private, fee-paying schooling was encouraged and local education authorities were encouraged to generate their own income
- closure of many primary boarding schools and pre-schools
- kindergartens in particular were regarded as a non-essential service and many were either closed (reduced from a total of 900 in 1990 to 700 in 1993) or run down
- drop-out and non-enrolment soared to an estimated 23% of children, mainly in poor and rural regions
- attendance at pre-school decreased, particularly in rural and marginal urban areas
- fall in real value of teachers' incomes, leading to increased absenteeism and teachers taking second jobs

The impact of transition on basic education has extended much further than the ability of the state to provide. Rising poverty has also made it difficult for children to access education as parents are now called upon to contribute to food, clothing and other costs

at pre-schools and boarding schools. In addition, there is pressure on many children to contribute to the family income in both rural and urban areas. These factors combined have led to a slump in pre-school coverage from 25% of the eligible population before transition to 17%. Ironically, as resources have dwindled, state spending in the pre-school sector has effectively subsidised the education of those children whose parents can afford to pay a contribution to food costs, while the children of poor families are effectively excluded from kindergartens.

In urban areas, the numbers of children working (most noticeably on the streets) has boomed. The poorest children live in small settlements in the districts or on the edge of towns. Their families are too poor even to herd, and they frequently come from single parent households. These families cannot afford the new kindergarten costs - the food, enough clothing and footwear for the winter, pencils and exercise books.

Rural children, whilst not necessarily living in such dire poverty, present a different problem of inclusion. They are very isolated, and eight is late to start primary school. Where primary boarding schools are available, families are often unable to meet the new demands for contributions. Economic pressures and the privatisation of herds has also had an impact as family survival depends on building up and maintaining their own herds and children are increasingly called upon to work.

'When there is a market economy there is also democracy. I read that in the paper. It's us who are going to decide. But we can't decide very much if we don't know what to decide about. That's why education is so important.... Lots of pupils have dropped out of school. There was one boy who was very clever but his family decided that he had to tend the... animals. That's because some people think that if children don't get good marks they might as well leave school. But they get bad marks because they don't have the textbooks, or because they don't have time to do their homework. So they just have to leave, I think it's very unfair. It's very very bad for the children and for our country.' 13 year old child

In addition to changes in the ability of the state to provide basic education and the ability of poor and marginalized children to access those services, fundamental changes are under way in the concept of and attitudes towards education. The existing pre-school and primary systems were heavily influenced by the Soviet model which can be characterised as hierarchical, centralised, inflexible and exclusive of marginalized children (poor, vulnerable, disabled). Under transition, the soviet approach which emphasizes the collective character of education and the transmission of subject based knowledge is being questioned in some quarters, and more child-centred education, reflecting the values of a more individualistic, Western society, is being explored as the alternative.

'There is some ambiguity about the quality of the service. On the one hand it is perceived to be very good, and worth going to considerable lengths to maintain. On the other hand there are uncertainties about the curriculum, and in particular whether or not a more child-centred, Westernized curriculum should be adopted. This dilemma is common to many countries in transition. Experiments are underway... to gradually introduce child-centred methods.' Helen Penn, External Consultant to Save the Children in Mongolia⁴

The response

What can an international NGO offer?

Save the Children's programme in Mongolia was set up in 1993/4, shortly after the transition process started and when the effects were at their worst. From the start, Save the Children's programme focused on the impact of transition on vulnerable children, pursuing a number of strategies to address Mongolia's transition-related difficulties by not only providing immediate relief, but also by seeking to address the root causes of vulnerability for children and their caregivers. This approach included programmes for street and working children as well as working with the government to develop a poverty alleviation programme. The emphasis on basic education as a key to tackling poverty and marginalization was identified from the outset:

*'Save the Children's focus on education stems from the conviction that Mongolia's schools and kindergartens can play a major preventative role in countering vulnerability among children during and after transition. Through its work Save the Children seeks to reverse the accelerating process of exclusion of vulnerable children so that, whatever their home circumstances, children can be assured of a place in society through the educational system.'*⁵

In the case of Mongolia, where children do not start primary school until the age of 8 (as discussed above under 'The impact of transition on basic education'), it was clear that a strategy prioritising basic education had to focus on the pre-school sector if issues of access to a relevant education for disadvantaged children were to be effectively addressed. In the following paragraphs we outline the different initiatives taken by Save the Children which have contributed to strengthening and improving existing basic education provision through the pre-school system. These initiatives can be summarised in two main areas: firstly, acting as a bridge between key actors to motivate positive action, and secondly, piloting and promoting new approaches which tackle the challenges of both provision and quality of pre-school education.

Acting as a bridge/motivator

The international perspective and experience which Save the Children as an international NGO was able to bring to its new programme in Mongolia was a defining element in strategic and operational decisions taken. The initial decision to explore the needs of children in Mongolia in the immediate post-communist period was based on an understanding of the processes of economic and political transition and their potentially devastating effect on all areas of society and particularly on children.

Based on this global perspective, the organisation was able, principally through the Programme Director, to see the impact of transition at the local level within the wider international framework. Save the Children subsequently played a key role in communicating this perspective to local actors and decision-makers, and was well placed to do this as one of the few international agencies operating in the country during the early phases of transition.

In its Mongolia programme, Save the Children has operated at all levels: within national policy making; with government institutions at a provincial and district level; and within individual schools and households. The breadth of the programme has been based on a sound understanding of local politics and administration gained through working contacts at the different levels. Having a small population has made this coverage easier, although the difficulties of travelling vast distances in subzero temperatures have had to be overcome.

Through dialogue, Save the Children has played an important part in redefining poverty in a transitional country. Under communism, jobs and services were available for everyone, and anyone who did not work was seen as merely lazy or foolish. Under transition and structural adjustment, the nature of poverty changed: people lost their jobs, and services shrank or became costly. But many people held and still hold onto their old attitudes that poverty is a self-inflicted disgrace. Defining who the poor are, how they are identified, and who is responsible for ameliorating poverty, has been a central theme in dialogue with actors at all levels. Save the Children has been pivotal in working with the Government to help it develop its Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) and in mobilizing external and internal support for them. Throughout, Save the Children liaised closely with the PAP Director and together identified research and training needs. On the research side, this included commissioning an initial report on vulnerable groups in transitional Mongolia⁶ and a training manual on monitoring. On the training side, a social work course was launched at the university which included training in child rights for staff working at a local level. In addition, many training packages associated with the programme and its implementation and monitoring were implemented by Save the Children staff for administrators, at national and local level. This in turn has generated wider discussion about poverty and its effects at national and local level.

Through the PAP, Save the Children has helped to raise awareness of the links between poverty alleviation and basic education provision. This was achieved through dialogue with different actors/policymakers and a range of activities including, in 1995, commissioning a key report which was submitted by officials to the Ministry of Education and Science (MOSE). The report outlined ways in which the pre-school sector could be developed to provide more places and address poverty, at little extra cost to the system.⁷ These suggestions were adopted by the government under Resolution 46 in April 1995, known as the National Pre-school Strengthening Programme (NPPS). The NPPS aims to support, transform and extend access to the kindergartens, and to use them explicitly as an inclusionary measure to protect poor and vulnerable children against the worst effects of transition through the following policy objectives:

- to create a relevant educational structure for the children of both nomadic and settled areas;
- to improve pre-school education content and methodology, and to improve the provision of training materials;
- to offer support for non-state kindergartens;
- to increase parental roles and responsibilities for pre-school child development, and promote home pre-school education;
- to improve teacher's skills and capabilities.

Piloting new approaches within the education system

By 1996 the NPPS programme was well established under MOSTEC and kindergartens were slowly re-opening. Through a combination of a small grants programme and other pilot initiatives, Save the Children has been involved in developing schemes to promote the inclusion of poor and marginalized children in pre-schools.

The provision of grants to cover the food costs of poor children attending kindergartens was an initiative started in 1994 in response to a request to cover the food costs of a group of poor children to enable them to attend kindergarten. Save the Children extended this initiative and successfully encouraged support from local businesses and other international NGOs. Through Save the Children's involvement in the design of the PAP, food cost subsidies were included in the range of services that poor families could apply for. Other initiatives have included the establishment of 'shift groups' which offer

pre-school provision for fewer hours per day thereby reducing the need for food costs.

The distribution of grants has been linked to initiatives which promote the inclusion of poor children, such as food cost subsidies to kindergartens which do not segregate groups of poor children (a practice which has been common) but instead group children according to age. In line with this policy of promoting inclusion in mainstream pre-schools, Save the Children has not supported proposals from other kindergartens targeted specifically at poor children.

Through the NPPS, Save the Children has supported the development of creative initiatives aimed at including isolated children in rural areas into pre-school and primary school services. Grants have supported rural kindergartens in developing special outreach programmes for isolated children and short intensive programmes for herders' children in the year before they are due to start primary school.

The small grants programme has also been used to promote the sustainability of kindergartens by supporting pilot projects to demonstrate rationalisation, cost recovery and income generation. Grants are one-off and recipient kindergartens and local authorities are encouraged to aim for self-sufficiency through initiatives such as building up animal herds or cultivating vegetables. The success of these projects has varied from one district to another, and in some cases where income has been successfully generated, it has not necessarily been spent in such a way as to promote the inclusion of poor or marginalized children. Some of the problems encountered in putting these and other initiatives into practice or replicating them more widely are explored in more detail in section II, part 3.

The NPPS has also focused on promoting curricula towards more responsive, child-centred content and methods and one of the criteria for receipt of NPPS funds is that kindergartens must have a 'methodologist' in place. Curricular change was not initially considered a priority by Save the Children staff, but quickly became so as the importance of and ambivalence about the curriculum emerged in discussion with officials. Mongolians had been proud of their reputation for educational reform and development, along communist lines, and the national curriculum was encoded in weighty documents; yet at the same time there was an uncomfortable and partial recognition that this curriculum should change and become more westernized. Save the Children has been involved in teacher training initiatives and pilot projects to develop the role of the methodologist in kindergartens. In order to support this area of work, specialists were recruited into the programme, and external advisers employed. This was backed up by investment in sending key officials and programme staff to training courses elsewhere in the South East Asia region to study curricular developments and gain exposure to other learning experiences.

In addition to the piloting of initiatives within the education sector through the NPPS, Save the Children has developed other related programmes which address the needs of vulnerable children including self-help programmes for street/working children and social welfare programmes to train and provide educational welfare officers for schools. These initiatives complement the efforts within the pre-school sector in raising awareness of the needs of disadvantaged children and the role of the education sector in addressing those needs.

Save the Children's approach in Mongolia

While the central strategic objective of working to strengthen pre-school education provision as part of an approach to tackling poverty has been fairly clear since the start of Save the Children's programme in Mongolia (based on an initial needs assessment study in 1992), it would be wrong to give the impression that it was a carefully planned and executed set of steps, each following the other chronologically, and scientifically designed to achieve the goals identified:

'Whatever the intentions of those who introduce it, seen close-up, change rarely seems rational or planned. Far more often it appears patchy and spasmodic, happening in fits and starts in response to a particular event - a new political appointment, an unexpected donor, freak weather, or sympathetic coverage in the press. In transition, the rate of change can be giddy, and what might have been a suitable strategy one week, is no longer viable a month later. Yet at the same time the fiction of orderly change must be maintained; transparent agreed strategies, systematic implementation; documentation, careful monitoring and evaluation.' Helen Penn, External Consultant to Save the Children in Mongolia⁹

The following paragraphs offer a range of perspectives from the different actors involved in Save the Children's programme to give a picture of the complex process of building trust, animating and challenging ideas, and seeking effective solutions.

Coming in at the right time

Save the Children began its programme in Mongolia at a crucial time, just as the effects of transition were beginning to emerge and at a time when few other international NGOs were active and the agenda for reform was being driven almost entirely by financial considerations. Identifying appropriate responses at key moments, based on an understanding of the local and international context and careful listening to partners and key individuals, has been an important factor in developing the programme within Mongolia.

In the beginning one of the first contacts to be established was with Nordov Bolormaa, then head of the National Children's Centre which co-ordinated activities for children including out-of-school activities. She describes how, through a small investment in a piece of research, it was possible to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the pre-school sector at a time when it was seen as a low-priority and being allowed to become run down:

'When Save the Children opened its office here, no other NGO was interested in the preschool sector. In the socialist period, kindergartens (and other activities for children) were well developed. As transition began, parents were required to pay 50% of the food costs. Many parents could not pay and very quickly coverage slumped from 25% to 17%. Many kindergartens closed down. There was a big unit at the Ministry of Education (MOSTEC) responsible for the pre-school sector, with many specialist advisers, but the entire unit was disbanded, and only one person was left in charge at the pre-school desk. There was talk of abolishing the entire pre-school sector, and transferring its resources to the secondary sector; it was regarded as too marginal to be worth saving.'

'We thought the need was there, and with Save the Children, I commissioned a situation analysis. This was undertaken by Enkbat (see below). The situation analysis showed that demand for kindergartens was still strong, and our own complementary research showed that children who attended kindergarten did well at school, but that many parents were simply too poor to afford it.'

'As a result of our surveys there was a big public debate which highlighted the way in which the kindergartens were being decimated. We argued that they were an important part of social policy. Save the Children extended these arguments and played a major role in saving the sector from deterioration and collapse, by arguing that kindergartens could be used to promote inclusion and combat poverty.'

Nordov Bolormaa, Former Head of the National Children's Centre

Avoiding pre-conceptions and fixed plans

The process of identifying effective interventions at the right time is tied up with a flexible approach to working which avoids assumptions and pre-conceived strategies but instead aims to develop a responsive programme based on a careful analysis of the local context.

'Changing social attitudes takes time. What was different about Save the Children was that unlike other agencies they did not come in with their own programmes, with no consideration of local needs and local context, but they set out to explore the situation and find local solutions to local problems. Many UN agencies have big bilateral programmes but are oblivious to what goes on underneath. They have no local support - they offer higher salaries, use more funds, and when they go no-one can keep the project going. Also many foreigners come in and they are not really committed and devoted to what they are doing. But Save the Children based their work on local needs and conditions, and did a lot with a very small budget, and did it in such a way that it was easy to take over.' Nordov Bolormaa, Former Head of National Children's Centre

'The local context is important. We make good use of a wide range of information and do a proper needs assessment. Our programmes are based on the thorough assessment of local needs, close feedback and monitoring. We reach local grassroots levels but we also have the ability to develop small projects into big national programmes.' Save the Children national staff

Adopting a low-key approach and building trust

As one of the first international NGOs in Mongolia in the post-communist period, it was vitally important to tread carefully and sensitively in order to win the trust of the different actors and government departments who were ultimately in a position to achieve practical policy changes at national level. Nordov Bolormaa describes the initial reaction of the Ministry of Education (MOSTEC) to the first pre-school situation analysis, and the strategy Save the Children and the National Children's Centre adopted in order to encourage them to act on its findings:

'At first everyone was surprised and shocked and said it was a Ministry affair and we were not supposed to intervene. They felt offended that outsiders such as Save the Children and the National Children's Centre had revealed the problems. We had to try to make the whole thing look like a MOSTEC initiative, put their name first on all the documents, and keep discussing it with them. As a result MOSTEC reconsidered their position, and instead with our help and prompting, introduced the NPPS.' Nordov Bolormaa, Former Head of National Children's Centre

The process of building respect and trust is complex and elusive to identify. Save the Children's approach in Mongolia was low-key and gently persuasive; a style of working set by the Programme Director, John Beauclerk, who was given a free hand in setting up the programme in 1994. The vision, attitude and approach of individuals is a factor not often openly recognised in the success or limitations of international NGO

programmes. The testimony gathered for this case study repeatedly refers to the contribution of the Programme Director. His personal impact on the programme confirms the view of Majid Rahnema,¹¹ a persistent critic of aid programmes, that ultimately it is only through personal relationships that international NGO projects have any kind of long-term impact. The ability to build up respect and good communication at all levels has been crucial to the success of the programme, achieved through a combination of personal characteristics and a genuine interest in, commitment and sensitivity to the local culture.

Even practical decisions, such as the location of the office (centrally, but unobtrusively, on the third floor of an office block in Ulaanbaator) and the availability of its staff to all visitors ranging from officials to children, send out messages about how an international NGO sees its own role and status in a host country and have an impact on the response and receptiveness of local partners:

‘I try to play down my own influence, and not sing the praises of Save the Children. If the programme is successful it doesn't matter whether or not people associate it with me or Save the Children. The institutional needs of donors are usually paramount. I try to reduce the institutional profile and it pays off hugely. Its a paradox that you get a reputation by not seeking one. Profile building is much more subtle than people think.’ John Beauclerk, Save the Children Programme Director

Identifying and working with key people at all levels

We have already mentioned the importance of identifying and working with key individuals in order to raise issues 'from within' and develop appropriate, locally owned initiatives to tackle the problems identified. The initial contact with Nordov Bolormaa which led to the influential situation analysis of the pre-school sector is one example. Through this contact and others, Save the Children was able to make links with and influence decision-makers in the Ministry of Education and other government departments.

As part of this process, Save the Children also identified and supported local consultants working outside the state structure such as Enkbat who was commissioned to undertake the original situation analysis of young children. He comes from a herding family and herded goats until he was eight, and like many of his contemporaries, went on to tertiary education. He became a management consultant at the university, but was constrained, like Bolormaa, by official requirements. Save the Children helped set him up to run an independent consultancy, and a social policy adviser was seconded from the UK to work with him for a year. Enkbat describes how he himself took part in the

process of identifying and working with the right people in order to bring about change:

'Once we had done the needs analysis we had to work out how to get people to take it on board. We had days and nights of discussion. We decided it depended on working with key people rather than storming the system. We set up a working group with wide local representation. John was a key influence. Education was not his field and he did not have much direct influence, but he is a communicator and a mobilizer. He gave us impetus. No-one understood how poverty was going to hit us under transition, and he helped raise public awareness, but he did it through other people, and managed to get locals negotiating with locals, rather than doing it all as an outside agency.' Enkbat

Identifying local potential, investing in and developing the skills of individuals such as Enkbat was an approach which was applied across the board: key officials in the education sector as well as local Save the Children staff were sent on training courses in Mongolia and elsewhere in the South East Asia region. Investment in local staff was an important element in building up a strong, committed local team. Tsendsuren, project officer responsible for the pre-school programme describes how her attitudes and outlook have changed since she joined Save the Children in 1997, having previously worked as a researcher for the School of Educational Development (SED):

'John has a specific way of choosing staff. He knows who is who and he has intuition. He asks around, interviews, picks people well. I am very happy here, although I am a different character, my working style has changed. An NGO is different from a government. In a government job you work for a routine 8 hours. In an NGO you must love your job and be hardworking. I take pleasure from my job. At SED I concentrated on the children, on what they were able to do, and what helped them to learn. I focused on curriculum and methods in the pre-school sector. I was 7 years at SED and everything carried on in the same way. When I started work at Save the Children my thinking changed. Save the Children is a very different agency from SED. Here the concentration is on poor children and why they can't attend kindergarten. Instead of the curriculum, the priority is poor families and how you reach them, what methods will reach them. Now I understand about poor families.' Tsendsuren Tumee, Save the Children Project Officer

Identifying and building on existing strengths

Seeking to develop the potential of individuals reflects a wider approach to identifying

and building on existing strengths within the Mongolian culture and social and state structures. Despite the rapid changes brought about by transition, prevailing attitudes, based as they were on socialist philosophies of social equity, state duty and public service, combined with an extensive state apparatus, provided opportunities for the development of an international NGO programme which had the potential to be far-reaching, effective and locally owned.

'We've collaborated as much as possible with people at national and local government level; not in any antagonistic way insisting on change, but strengthening what is here. Under transition there has been so much confusion, there are no fixed points of reference, ideas are whirling around. There were strengths here in what they had before transition. People say that communism was no good, that it was finished, but we needed to fix on something which they valued, to develop a strategy of strengthening what was there. People have half resented the collapse of communism and the fact that in the west communism equals failure; yet they also want our ideas, they want to know what options are open to them. If you confront the system brutally - as the critics of communism often do - you build up resentment or you can only operate with an elite client group. The nursery teachers here really thought they were doing a good job under communism, and it was wonderful to get behind them and support them in seeking to extend their practice. Other strategies would have got nowhere.' John Beauclerk, Save the Children Programme Director

'In all the activities, people's personalities, commitment and good will were of crucial importance. People are driven by their professional values and humanistic motives. At the time when salaries of workers in the sector are scarce, budgets are limited to the basics and the morale is lowering elsewhere in the state sector, the efforts of the teachers and officials who work hard to improve access and quality of the pre-school are much applauded.' Mandal Urtnasan, Save the Children Senior Project Officer

Being experimental/opportunistic

Flexibility based on listening and encouraging local ideas has underpinned an 'opportunistic policy' of trying a range of short-term pilot projects, developing those that work and abandoning those that do not:

'Change under transition is so rapid, it is fruitless to insist on anything or to harp on about projects. You've got to be flexible - if Tsendsuren and Mandal (project officers) don't like it, you can't go on with it, it's their line not our line. It's like building a hut, what sticks, sticks and what falls, falls - if initiatives catch on that's fine, if they don't, abandon them. We've had lots of very small short-term pilot projects - if they work that's fine, we try to use them or adapt them, and negotiate

with middle management over them, if they don't work, we forget them. Its an opportunistic policy, but our job as an NGO is to be with people at the stage they're at and support them in what they want to do. It's hard for me to plan precisely - the most surprising things catch on.'
John Beauclerk, Save the Children Programme Director

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Has the programme made a difference, and who to? As the above accounts illustrate, perceptions about poverty and its causes have shifted. Nordov Boloorma lost her own job with the National Children's Centre in the process of transition, but now runs the Mongolian Child Rights Centre and still works closely with Save the Children. She describes how her own views have changed:

'As a government official I used to see things from the top down, and we were not in a position to be critical about government policy. We thought poor people were poor because they were lazy, it was their fault. But now I understand that our social policy was wrong. We put people in a position where they could not do anything about their circumstances. I used to blame people. Now I understand they have no opportunities to change their own life, no access to information or power. We were not flexible enough to listen to poor people or address their needs. When a person is a civil servant he is constrained. You cannot disagree with Government statistics. I could not be frank and say yes, I know there are street children. At the NGO level you have less power but more flexibility, you can be more accurate and precise in your estimates, not merely to criticize but to explore the real situation.'

The PAP and NPPS are partly an expression of this new concern to tackle the real effects of poverty on children, and are funded by a variety of agencies.

But what about impact on the ground? There is still much to learn about how the NPPS has affected access to and quality of pre-school education, and in particular how it has benefited children marginalized through poverty or isolation. The following paragraphs look at the views of those who have been directly affected by the changes being brought about through the NPPS.

The parents views

Groups of poor parents were asked by Save the Children staff and an external consultant how they had come to use the kindergarten, and then encouraged to discuss more generally the points they raised in conversation.¹³ Poor parents were

understandably very grateful for the service. Almost all of those interviewed had previously been employed, but under transition were jobless. They welcomed the education their children were getting, and with real respect for teachers, did not doubt that it was of a good quality.

But above all they were desperately conscious of their own inability to provide for their children and welcomed the respite provided by the kindergarten service. Their only complaint was that they did not have enough of it. Kindergartens were seen by almost all parents, in whatever category, as a full time service, educating and caring for children for a full working day, and making sure they were properly fed, properly rested, and properly exercised. The poorer children mostly attended on a part-time or shift basis and this was regarded as insufficient.

Box 2: Parental perceptions of pre-schools

Weaknesses

- *in the sum many people are unemployed, few people can afford the kindergarten, only teachers and doctors and government workers*
- *conditions are not good, we cannot look after our children, the climate is very hard, there is no electricity, fuel costs are very expensive*
- *I have no income, I cannot feed my children, here they get fed*
- *I would like to take the children to kindergarten but I cannot afford it. The food and clothes costs are very expensive. If my children went to kindergarten they would have a chance to improve their future prospects. I want my children to go to kindergarten and to school*
- *we would like full-time kindergarten, 8-1.30 is such a short period, we cannot go out*
- *the shift group is not enough for families who have no food, they only get a cup of milk*
- *the shift group time is very short, it is good for children to have more time*
- *the kindergarten is good but it is only 9-2. After 2pm our children are in the street. They get their hands and face dirty.*

- *I would like a longer time. My child was very stressed because his father died, now he is more calm after coming to kindergarten*

Strengths

- *I cannot express my gratitude enough, I am shelterless and live with this lady in her ger, there are 14 of us*
- *It is very hard for the countryside. Before we had everything. Our clothes were very clean. Now we do not even have clothes for school, there are no notebooks for the children*
- *If children go to the kindergarten they can sing, their clothes stay clean, they communicate with each other*
- *I have 6 children, I am happy with the kindergarten as it is warm, clean and there is food here*

Many of the kindergartens visited had integrated poor children as unobtrusively as possible and tried to interpret the policy about inclusiveness as constructively as possible. In others, although poor children had at least been admitted in small numbers, the view was that poor children were a group apart, from families that were less than adequate, and therefore the children should not mix with “normal” children. In one of the kindergartens which pursued this policy of separation, the parents were asked whether they thought it was a good idea.

Q: Should poor children and normal children be in the same class together or have separate lessons?

- *I like a separate group because ordinary children have a different level of life, their clothes are different, they are made of different material, even their shoes are different*
- *with the younger children mixed groups would be possible, but not with seven year olds, its too late. Ordinary and poor children are really different*
- *you can see in the playground poor children and normal children stand separately*
- *I would like to see them mixed up but our children are aware, they see that I am poor*

It emerged that one of the kindergarten groups closed in winter, because the clothes distribution was not co-ordinated with access to kindergarten, and without clothes and boots, not enough children come to make the class viable. Parents were asked what they thought about this policy:

Q: Should the kindergarten group close in winter?

- *It's true, in wintertime children don't come*
- *some families could manage the clothes and boots and the kindergarten doesn't need to close the group, although it would be hard for teachers with just a few children*

Q. (to kindergarten director, who is still present): 'Couldn't the budget be shared out to provide more resources for poor children?'

- *the state budget is for normal children. The state budget is not for poor children.¹⁴*

These quotes reveal the difficulties in changing engrained negative attitudes towards poverty at both the level of parents and service providers. In thinking about how to promote more sensitive understanding of the causes of poverty under transition, Save the Children staff have considered and rejected the use of with-holding grants as a sanction, in favour of a more constructive approach that continues to explore ways of reinforcing the equal status of all children and recognises that a shift in attitudes will be a gradual process.

Paradoxically, in view of the differentiation between 'poor' and 'normal' children, the intention of kindergartens in the communist tradition was to offer an upbringing in citizenship and social solidarity, a much wider role than that assumed by pre-school services in the West. These are some parents' views on citizenship:

Q: What makes a good citizen?

- *As a good father I will give an example to my child*
- *My child knows he must be good*
- *the family is important but the education level makes a difference, so kindergarten is very important*
- *There is a good Mongolian tradition that children should listen to their parents*

Q: What would you like your child to be when he/she grows up?

- *a professional person, a good citizen*
- *to have a good education*
- *he will have a good profession, not be a dependent person*
- *she will have a good professional job, and not be dependent*
- *a good professional job and the ability to help other people*

Q: What makes a good citizen?

- *intelligence and cleverness*
- *being a professional*
- *listening to parents and listening to others*
- *not dependent*
- *being a help to others*
- *caring for younger brothers and sisters*
- *hardworking*
- *it depends on your personal life. If you come from a poor family you will be more generous and less selfish*

The demarcations between professional and amateur under communism were pronounced: a professional service had in all respects to be provided by those appointed and trained to do so, and there was little or no tradition of voluntarism. Some of the parents said that they would like to contribute to the nursery in kind, if not in money, but hardly any in fact had been able to make such contributions. The issue of parental involvement in pre-school provision, which has been fruitfully developed in other contexts, offers scope for improved community/school partnerships in post-communist societies.

- *if they would only open up a new room for the kindergarten, I would do anything, make chairs for the children (father)*
- *we would clean up the rooms and make them suitable*

The teachers views

What did teachers make of their circumstances? The need for changes had been recognised, partly, on the basis of the need for new, more inclusive strategies towards children for a country in transition, and partly on the basis of a new, more modern curriculum to bring teachers up to date.

Kindergarten teachers were interviewed in the region of Gobi Altai, in the south of Mongolia, where the remoteness of the desert steppes means that young children are brought up in conditions of extreme isolation. Under the lead of the innovative regional Director of Education and his pre-school adviser, the teachers have had opportunities to discuss and reflect on the new policies. One teacher interviewed regularly visited herder's children, travelling by horse, camel, motorbike or whatever transport was available, to carry out an outreach programme devised by the kindergarten. Many poor children in the immediate district come to the kindergarten, and in addition the kindergarten runs a one month intensive training course for children aged 7-8 who are due to start school. All these activities are carried out without extra staff and with very little extra money, and teachers were asked whether they felt it was difficult or unreasonable to take on such extra work:

'Teachers are hardworking because they must do it. If they are not hardworking maybe they will be unemployed. In a market economy whoever works harder gets richer. The governors and citizens will see how hard we work. I hope our kindergarten will be big again with many staff and rich with materials.'

In other regions, teachers interviewed were less keen to adapt, and would not undertake any extra work, unless paid to do so, referring to their rights and conditions of service. This teacher works in a provincial capital:

'Teachers don't like extra training, because the Aimag (region) cannot pay for extra study. Working with extra children is an imposition'

The view was also expressed that parents did not bring their children to kindergarten not because they were too poor, but because they were too ignorant, and not convinced of its value. Parents had to be educated about what professionals could provide in pre-school:

'parents are beginning to understand the role and value of pre-schools so they are more and more interested in school preparation. But not enough parents want to use pre-school.'

Under the Save the Children programme, training sessions (carried out by the School of Educational Development) were organised in every region to induct teachers about NPPS and new teaching methods. Teachers comments from evaluation sessions were collected. The training sessions focused heavily on the introduction of child-centred teaching methods, and the quality of the curriculum of the kindergartens was seen as a central issue at that stage by trainers and teachers alike. Teachers saw themselves as being in need of professional upgrading, although a little uneasy of what this meant in terms of methodologies. The School of Educational Development, with whom Save the Children is closely linked and partly supports, runs annual national teacher competitions for “best teacher award” and “best kindergarten award” and there is public acclaim for teachers who can prove themselves by having well-educated, well-performing children. But as with UK league tables, this striving for the best is sometimes seen by teachers to be at odds with having children from poor families, rather than having an intake of very competent children:

- *we would like to follow a more flexible curricula in line with the latest international and national developments in pre-school education content and curricula as well as the needs and interests of Mongol children*
- *there is an urgent need to change the pre-school curriculum*
- *there are certain achievements in introducing child centred approaches and integrated training*
- *the pre-school initiatives in terms of teacher retraining, child-centred integrated training and efforts to develop children and encourage their independent learning became broader than in the past*

However some reservations were expressed about the introduction of foreign methods:

'we should draw attention to the fact that sometimes we are playing with the mentality of Mongolian children following and introducing foreign models and activities which may not suit our children.'

Some teachers however are aware of the need to diversify and to be more inclusive: *'Pre-schools are now introducing various alternatives in order to reach out to all pre-school age children in their catchment area, such as shift groups, care groups and non-formal training.'*

The views of Administrators and Politicians

Local government in Mongolia is relatively strong and well organized. At aimag (regional) level there is a Director of Education who is part of a group of senior officials reporting regularly to the elected aimag governor. Partly as a result of Save the Children intervention there is now in most aimags a pre-school adviser/inspector who draws up the plans for the kindergartens in the region, organizes their in-service training, and carries out inspections of individual kindergartens on a two or three yearly basis. She also compiles the local statistics according to criteria set by the Ministry of Education. At the sum (district) level, there is also an elected governor, reporting to a citizen's hural or assembly, who often works closely with the kindergarten director and school director. The influence of the sum governor can be critical. Where he is positive and interested in the kindergarten, he can make a great difference. This governor of a sum near the Siberian border was very enthusiastic:

'Our future starts from the kindergarten. Last year we had a meeting of the citizen's hural. The hural said we could not afford two groups in the kindergarten. I said there would be, and I made sure the budget was available for the salaries. I wanted two mixed groups. I did not think poor children should be separated from other children. I make sure the provision of clothes is co-ordinated by the kindergarten so that lack of clothes or footwear does not prevent children from coming to school. The kindergarten teachers work hard because I support them. As a result of the Save the Children project we have established a farm, and with the profits from animal products we have bought toys and there will be money left to upgrade the playground. If possible I want all children to be covered.'

This governor was exceptional. But in the same region, Save the Children staff also encountered a negative governor, who felt he could do very little, and where, although Save the Children had given a grant, no poor children, as yet, had been admitted to the kindergarten:

'Life is very hard here. The Save the Children have imposed hard criteria. It would make more sense to have flexible criteria. We have paid for heating to reopen the kindergarten but although it has empty rooms we do not have any extra money for poor children. The money for clothes from the poverty alleviation fund goes only to schoolchildren.'

Children's views

Children themselves, and particularly young children, represent the group whose views it is most difficult to obtain. In Mongolia, where children are brought up to respect their

elders and not to contradict them, and the rigidity of the communist system reinforced such views, this is a particularly challenging area. Helen Penn, external consultant to the Save the Children Mongolia programme, explains what happened when she and Save the Children staff tried to gather the views of children in kindergartens:

'We did try to take groups of kindergarten children aside, but they were very shy and tongue-tied, children from herding families especially so. They spoke to us in agonized whispered monosyllables, despite all Tsendsuren's efforts to put them at their ease. We could glean that children had hard lives by Western standards - young boys were expected to herd animals and both boys and girls were expected to show considerable physical stamina and endurance.' Helen Penn, External Consultant, Save the Children Mongolia 15

While the priority given to encouraging and listening to 'children's voices' is largely prompted by Western based international NGOs, it will be difficult to develop locally appropriate methods for encouraging children to begin to express their views. Many child focused organisations, including Save the Children, who wrestle daily with this challenge in different situations and regions, have learnt from experience that adults asking direct questions of children can often be a counterproductive and inhibiting approach and that a range of different activities and approaches need to be explored in order for children's views to find their expression. Paradoxically, this process itself cannot begin until the value of children's views is recognised on the ground. These are challenges which have only begun to be identified in the Mongolian context, and the international NGO role in this process has yet to be fully developed.

What has been learnt?

Save the Children's programme in Mongolia offers useful lessons about approaches to working with a state system to shape changes in central thinking and achieve positive changes in education practice.

Interpreting poverty

In Mongolia, SCF was able to draw on its international perspective in assisting national government to interpret international economic trends and their impacts on poverty and children at the local level. Operating in an environment where there was no tradition of international NGOs, this experience demonstrates the value of adopting a low key approach that sought to a) build up trust with government officials at different levels; b) identify and work with key people in order to promote a shift in attitudes towards poverty, and; c) build up local skills and inspire locally owned strategies for tackling rising poverty.

Paradoxically, the context of rapid economic change which gave rise to many of the problems identified, also gave rise to a climate where it was possible to question existing attitudes and practices and to introduce new approaches to poverty and education. The study demonstrates the importance of undertaking thorough analysis, not only as a basis for effective programme planning, but also to stimulate local debate. In this case, research into the links between economic transition and poverty, jointly commissioned by Save the Children and the government, provided a practical framework for officials to interpret events and to introduce more poverty-focused policies. This led, ultimately, to the national government's commitment to preserving and improving pre-school education provision as a means of tackling the marginalization of poor and vulnerable children.

The role of pre-school education in poverty alleviation

Pre-school provision has traditionally enjoyed an important place within education systems influenced by the Soviet system. In Mongolia, where children do not start primary school until the age of 8, pre-school provision has had an even greater impact on children's lives. The rapid contraction of the pre-school sector at the start of the transition period reflected pressures on government to cut back public expenditure, and were not the result of any co-ordinated policy changes.

The research commissioned by Save the Children demonstrated that those worse affected by rising poverty were very young children. These findings stimulated local recognition of the potential for a revived pre-school system to mitigate against the effects of poverty on children. In the Mongolian context, the benefits of pre-school provision on early child development and future educational performance were well understood by officials with a soviet legacy, and the infrastructure was already in place, though badly neglected. A national commitment to preserving the pre-school sector evolved into a commitment to extend its scope and impact, with ambitious targets to increase attendance to 80% of the eligible population by the year 2000, while pre-transition coverage only reached 27%.

The Mongolia study also demonstrates the importance of combining changes in policy at government level with the development of practical approaches to achieving change at school level. Drawing on experience from elsewhere, Save the children piloted a range of creative and cost-effective ways of improving pre-school education (not all of them successful) aimed at making it more sustainable, accessible and responsive to the needs of poor and disadvantaged children. While a new focus on poverty was compatible with the inherited soviet philosophy of social equity at the government level, it was not easily absorbed at the level of individual schools and parents. This experience underlines that change in attitudes happens in pockets rather than uniformly, and is inevitably a gradual, and often frustrating process.

Introducing change

In Mongolia there is both loyalty to and dissatisfaction with communist education systems, and changes are met with mixed feelings by both policymakers and teachers. In this context, curricular change and new methods aimed at making education provision more relevant to children's needs must be sensitively introduced if they are to be effective. In order to increase exposure to child-centred learning methodologies, Save the Children arranged for key officials to attend training courses on curricular development within the South East-Asia region. These officials were then involved in the process of curriculum change and the development of teacher training initiatives within Mongolia. In this way, Save the Children sought to promote changes at both policy-making and classroom level.

It is important to recognise that a key element of Save the Children's intervention, the introduction of child-centred approaches to education, comes out of the organisation's Western/European outlook. That Save the Children's analysis is born of its cultural background is as inevitable as the changes which currently rack Mongolian society as a result of its rapid entry into the global economy. In the context of transition, Save the Children concluded that if the pre-school education system was to become more flexible within the changing environment and more responsive to children's needs, it must include child-focused teaching approaches. Save the Children's approach, which targets both policymakers and teachers at classroom level, aims to develop local skills and capacity in order to develop curricula and approaches which, while being more child-centred, are adapted to the Mongolian context. The initial outcomes of this approach have been positive, though it has yet to be evaluated more formally.

The approach of the international NGO

While the focus of this study is on education, it also charts the start up of Save the Children's programme in Mongolia, showing the rationale for initial operational and programmatic choices. In the absence of a local NGO structure, Save the Children concentrated on working with government, gradually building up the trust of key officials who had little or no previous experience of working with external agencies.

Intervening at a crucial moment of economic transition offered opportunities for influencing at the heart of a policymaking structure which was still centralised, but also receptive to ways of interpreting and tackling the effects of the overwhelming social and economic changes brought by transition. Save the Children was able to use this opportunity to help redefine attitudes to poverty, recognising its particular impact on children, and prioritising the pre-school system as a tool in tackling the negative effects of economic transition.

The recruitment and training of culturally sensitive and competent staff who were themselves open to new ways of working has been an essential element of this process. The importance of individuals in development programmes tends to be underplayed in the quest for more strategic working approaches. However, this case study demonstrates clearly that individuals can make or break a programme.

Editors' Conclusions

- The speed of change in Mongolia (as in other societies in economic transition) compromised the ability of government to provide basic education just when, more than ever, children needed the skills and knowledge which a responsive education could give them to prepare them for life in the new context.
- Save the Children's pre-school education programme in Mongolia developed as a response to the problems thrown up by rapid economic transition, but was also based on the organisation's (primarily western) ideas about the value of child centred learning and the developmental purpose of education.
- Former centrally-planned economies lack experience of developing systems that are responsive to community needs. There were particular difficulties in developing locally appropriate methods for encouraging children to express their views, in a culture where this has generally been discouraged.
- The introduction of ideas that were essentially external required a high level of sensitivity but by increasing local understanding of the links between poverty and education, Save the Children acted as a catalyst to a process of education reform which is locally owned. The vision, attitude and approach of key staff was critical in gaining acceptance and influencing policy-makers.
- The programme aim was to protect and improve the pre-school system. The broader aim was that this would serve to alleviate poverty in the present as well as prevent future poverty. There is little evidence to date that this has been achieved, and in many places pre-school provision continues to benefit the better off children, while poor children still have limited access.
- Nevertheless, there is evidence that without the changed attitudes of key policymakers with whom this programme has worked, there would be no pre-school system in Mongolia today within which to tackle these issues.

Notes

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SECTION V. LINKING SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

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The problems:

- Under-resourcing, and the problems for school providers
- The quality of human interaction
- A culture of non-responsiveness

The approach:

- Strengthening the voice of school users
- The Ethiopia study:
- The challenge of how to support service delivery
- Does responsiveness make a difference to quality?
- The Peru study:

A stronger role for civil society

Issues:

- Children's participation vs. adult attitudes
- Making decentralisation work
- The language of school - a key to participation + quality

In Section I we identified that one of the fundamental causes of poor quality schooling

is that in many societies there is no organic link between school systems and the society they serve. The case studies in this section describe attempts to improve schools by re-establishing this connection between the providers of schools and the users.

THE PROBLEM

The two studies are set in very different political and institutional settings, one in Africa and one in Latin America, yet there are underlying similarities to the problems they attempt to address. Both cases describe situations where it is widely acknowledged that state schools fail to deliver an effective education to many children, and particularly for children of the poor. Under-resourcing is a major reason, but the assumption behind both these studies is that there are other factors about how schools are set up and run which stop them being effective, and that to bring about long term improvements it will be necessary also to tackle these.

Under-resourcing, and the problems for school providers

Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world, serves as an extreme example of how poverty and under-resourcing limit school opportunity. An estimated 65% of the population live below the poverty level, unable to afford an adequate diet or obtain basic necessities. Rates of access to health, education, welfare services and water are extremely low. Government school provision currently serves fewer than 20% of children of school age, with large disparities between rural and urban areas. (The equivalent figures for access to health services are a national average 45%, while in rural areas this often falls as low as 2%.) But even where schools exist they are often under-utilised, reflecting their poor quality and irrelevance to the lives of people facing serious survival problems.

The Somali-speaking Region, where the Ethiopia study is set, is one of the poorest and most under-developed in the country. When political change led to decentralisation in linguistic-based regions, the newly-set up Education Bureau in this region started from an extremely limited base of resources, both human and financial. It also faced unusually difficult obstacles for any service provider: an area of low population density, where many people have to move periodically in search of grazing, plus a large refugee population being resettled. While the switch to Somali as the medium in schools was welcome, in a population with few school-educated people it was impossible to find a supply of trained teachers able to teach in Somali, or people with the experience to prepare a new curriculum and text books.

The quality of human interaction

While not all of these problems are caused by under-resourcing, all are made much

more difficult to solve when resources are limited. But in similar contexts elsewhere donor-supported reforms that have concentrated on resource inputs have failed to turn poor quality school systems into more effective ones.

The Peru case study takes the analysis of problems one step further. A group of education professionals who form the NGO featured in this case study, Foro Educativo, have criticised the national processes of education reform, led by the World Bank, on the grounds that there is too little involvement of school users in defining problems. Foro Educativo, with Save the Children's support, attempted to define what criteria one would use to judge quality from the point of view of what children experience. Schools are social institutions, and whatever the level of resourcing, the quality of the school experience for children is primarily determined by the human interactions. In this teachers have the definitive role, and Foro Educativo consider that the national reforms do not pay sufficient attention to the critical question of teaching quality. This is a situation paralleled in many other donor-supported education reforms. Though they may include elements of teacher training this is usually not a major component, and the issue of teachers' pay is usually specifically excluded - yet only with adequate rates of pay can one expect to keep trained people working in schools.

To upgrade existing schools in these contexts to an acceptable level of quality (let alone extend such provision to all children) would require a massive increase in resources, and this cannot be achieved in any sustainable way without changes in international economic relations. Meanwhile many school systems will continue to be under-resourced, and generations of children will receive a sub-standard experience of schooling. Are there other points at which some of the problems for children can be tackled?

A culture of unresponsiveness

Section I made the case that many problems of poor quality schooling are not essentially resource-related. [See ***What is wrong with schools?***] This is true particularly in the critical area of human interaction. Most poor quality school systems are over-bureaucratic, run by officials with little contact with the actual problems faced at school level, and dominated by rigid assumptions. Curricula are fixed from above and cannot be locally adapted by teachers to the reality children face. Relationships of teachers to children do not provide the kind of atmosphere in which children can learn and flourish. A narrow conception of progression through school prioritises examinations. Lack of experience by teachers of other approaches leads them to fall back on rote-learning of often irrelevant 'facts'. Parents have no role in determining what happens in school. Little about the way school is run encourages children to develop the ability to think for themselves. While it would take a considerable effort and some short term resources to bring about change in each of these areas, once change is set in motion it is not more expensive to run a flexible and responsive school system than a rigid and inappropriate

one.

These negative features can be summarised as *a culture of unresponsiveness*: an assumption that schools are to be set up by centralised decision making processes, with no requirement to involve the people who use schools. But this is only one side of the problem. Rigid and inappropriate systems could not continue unless teachers, parents and children accepted that they have no role in deciding what happens in schools. The culture of unresponsiveness has been in place for so long that school users are disempowered.

THE APPROACH

The premiss of both case studies is that it is possible to move to a more responsive relationship between school providers and users, and that if this can be done it will result in better schools, even within the parameters of lack of resources.

Strengthening the voice of school users Section II gave examples of how energy could be generated in poor communities to build and run their own schools. These studies describe programmes that seek to release similar energy in communities that *do* have schools, but poorly functioning ones. At the same time they seek to encourage school providers to be open to listening to these contributions, and to act on them. The two cases approach the task from opposite starting points, but both with the intention to strengthen the voice of school users (children, teachers, parents) in decisions about what happens in schools.

The Ethiopia study

Here Save the Children's primary relationship is with government education providers. Its efforts have been directed at encouraging officials to listen to what parents, teachers and children could tell them about the problems in schools, and to plan how to use their limited resources accordingly. Additional resources brought in by Save the Children were allocated within the plans produced in this way, and the key inputs enabled officials and teachers to acquire the skills and orientation to be able to continue running a more responsive school system.

• The challenge of how to support service delivery

This approach was in fact a considerable departure for Save the Children's own staff, who were experimenting with this approach learnt alongside their partners. Most local staff were new to work on education issues, and their formative experience of development work was either within the framework of relief operations in a refugee camp. Expatriates were more used to Save the Children's style of support to

government service delivery (in health, food security, etc) where a standard mechanism was to attach technical advisers to ministries, with the aim of supporting better planning and policy development. In certain cases this approach has demonstrably brought about change more wide-reaching than one could hope to achieve through discrete community-based initiatives. But the fragility of governments' capacity to deliver effective services has become more evident in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and has led staff in Save the Children to question the value of centrally placed technical support.

The Ethiopia programme was one of the first to demonstrate the potential for an external agency to play a catalytic role in building linkages between the two sides of the "systems and users" spectrum. Middle managers in Save the Children recognised the need to build their own staff capacity to work with communities, not just as receivers of services but as a primary participants in the planning. Training was given at various points in Participatory Rural Appraisal methods, Child-to-Child approaches, how to tackle disability issues, and the importance of listening to children. Regional Education Bureau participated in each type of training, so the partnership between government and international NGO took on new skills simultaneously, and together experimented with putting them into practice.

- **Does responsiveness make a difference to quality?**

The qualitative changes that one would hope to see as a result of a more responsive type of school system are difficult to measure. The Ethiopia study made a concerted effort to do this, through a participatory review of how parents, children and teachers perceived the changes in schools since the start of the programme. They looked not only for specific outcomes from specific inputs (e.g. was there a perceptible improvement in teacher-pupil relations after the teachers had been on training courses?) but also on the more long term question, whether there were indications of a change in the general culture of responsiveness. When people identified problems, did they attempt to do anything about them?

The review shows clear benefits of this 'linking' approach. The Regional Education Bureau has understood through practice the advantages of consulting communities, and while schools continue to suffer from all the problems of resource constraints (human and financial), they are nevertheless able to give children a more effective start towards a basic education.

The Peru study

In the Peru case the primary relationship is with school users. Here Save the Children has supported a local grouping of education professionals to initiate a series of activities

that aim to equip teachers, children and parents to be a stronger voice on what goes on in schools. One way of doing this is to give them regular access to information about national debates on education reform, so that they have a context into which to voice opinions. The other main set of activities aims at building their experience of articulating their views, and finding ways to get them heard publicly.

- **A stronger role for civil society**

This study demonstrates the role a local NGO can play in building connections between civil society and the government. There has been a growing recognition internationally of the vital role of 'civil society', but the term is vague and there is not much clarity about strategies. Within each social or political context, different possibilities open up or are closed. The task is to develop mechanisms that are politically feasible within that context; and the aim is to enable a variety of groups in society to act as a force to monitor the impact of national policies, to pressure government to be more transparent, and to open up national debate on education. This study builds on the strong Latin American tradition of social participation and organisation. It provides an example of a process through which many individuals who are not currently organised can be equipped to collectively press for education policy and practice that is more responsive to children's real needs. A pioneering series of national and regional consultations empowered groups such as parents to see that they had a valid contribution to make to the education debate, and similarly put government officials in a position where they recognised the value of listening to practitioners and users of schools.

ISSUES

Children's participation vs. adult attitudes

Both studies the issue of children's participation emerged out of a more general set of processes to encourage participation by adults with an interest in what happened in schools. In neither case was this a simple progression. In the Peru case, while the NGO initiators were conscious (at a conceptual level) of the importance of seeing what happened in schools from the perspective of what children experience, it was the process of participation itself that led them to realise they needed to place more emphasis on promoting children's participation, and to challenge prevailing paternalistic social attitudes to children. In the Ethiopia case the programme worked within a culture in which 'consulting the community' meant 'consulting the adult males'. Specific attempts had to be made to set up situations where women and children were involved in the discussions. These situations are typical of what would be encountered in many societies. The cases are interesting in highlighting the limits on children's participation, and also the possibilities that exist for challenging those limitations.

The language of school - a key to participation and quality

The Ethiopian case also highlights the issue of the language used in schools, which has direct relevance both for more participatory approaches, and for improving the quality of the experience of schooling for children. Participation is overwhelmingly oral; for parents and children, and also for most teachers, to have a serious input into discussions about what goes on in schools, they need to be free to do this in the language in which they are most articulate. But the aura associated with the official state language, which is usually the language of school, excludes such participation. The move to providing the first years of schooling in the language of the community opens up new possibilities of a real link between schools and society.

A change in language policy, and backing that up with practical support, is also a key to access and quality. With some notable exceptions most governments in Africa have only recently made provision for local language use in the first years of schooling, and in many other contexts there is still no recognition of the issue. In Ethiopia it was the move to regionalisation that brought with it a change in language policy. Amharic was historically the only permitted language of instruction in primary schools, which meant that all non-Amharic speaking children were having to learn in a foreign language. Now it is up to the region to decide the language of the first stages of schooling, and in most regions this is the language of the majority group of that region. In Region 5 the great majority of children are Somali speaking, were previously seen as a 'minority' and had to learn through a language they did not understand. They are now the majority group in their region and are able to learn in their own language.

But there are many practical challenges in making a reality of such a change in policy. New skills are required to develop a curriculum and materials in the new language, and to train a new intake of teachers who can teach in the new language. There are also knock-on effects for other groups of children: what can be done to give an equally positive start to children from language groups other than the majority one of the region?

Making decentralisation work

The Ethiopian study also illuminates questions about education provision within the context of decentralisation. In theory, decentralisation allows education provision to be more responsive to local needs. In practice there are many obstacles. There is typically a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of the centre and local levels, and lack of skills and capacity at local levels to carry out their new roles. The resource problems remain, and are in fact more extreme in remote districts which have little capacity to raise revenues but are expected to carry out a much increased range of functions. Even given the best circumstances, a fundamental change of philosophy about service

delivery would be required to bring about the hoped for advantages. Local level officials may be nearer the ground but they lack the experience and usually also the orientation to work effectively with communities. Without support to communities to encourage their active participation, 'decentralisation' will remain an affair of bureaucrats. And without specific support to officials to make the required transitions, and the chance to experience participation in action, the potential that decentralisation offers to involve local communities is unlikely to be realised.

'As different as ground and sky'* - Involving children and communities - A case study from Ethiopia

* Adapted from a comment of a school committee member during the evaluation, 'This year is as different from last year as the ground is different from the sky.'



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What are the problems for children?

Life in Somali Region 5

About 3.5 million ethnic Somalis form the second-largest geographical region (called Somali National Regional State, or Somali Region 5) in the new federal Ethiopia. Somali speakers live throughout the Horn of Africa: in the late 19th and early 20th centuries these areas were divided by colonial powers, dividing Somalis among five East African countries. A large number of Somali-speaking people now live in the eastern lowlands of Ethiopia. Most Somalis are herders whose economy depends on grazing and on finding water for livestock. Because they have a shared ancestry and a shared way of life, this area has strong cultural and economic ties with Somalia and Somaliland, and cross-border trade and migration are common.

Life in Somali Region 5 is challenging. For the past twenty years the region has suffered from the effects of conflict, drought, floods, and from large scale population movements. From 1987, the area was treated as a war zone, during which the Somali government fought to unite ethnic Somalis within its own borders, but the situation has stabilised since 1993 and the change in government. In addition to the Ethio-Somalia war, many parts of the region have been affected by clan conflict and unrest, typically over the use of natural resources and the control of trade links. As a result, the area has received only minimal development investment, and there is little social infrastructure outside of the relatively more settled Jijiga zone. As one author writes, there is '...hardly a road, a telephone, a school, or a clinic...' in this sparse region of the country¹.

'I was born here in Turanod, but I left in 1991. I lost all of my livestock, my house was burnt down, I had nothing. I had heard about the refugee camps so I went there. I stayed there for a few months and then rumours of guerrilla fighting forced the government to take us to a camp near Djibouti. But then there was conflict there, the government stores were looted, and we were forced to flee on to Boroma.' 35 year old woman².

Education is a particularly neglected area. When the Transitional Government of Ethiopia was installed in 1991, Region 5 had the lowest primary enrolment rates per capita³. There were few formal schools, and the majority had been destroyed or abandoned. Doors and tin roofs had been taken off their hinges. Bricks had been dismantled and used to build other structures. In one school not far from Jijiga town, primary classrooms were in such bad condition (broken desks, no blackboard, crumbling walls) that they were being used as toilets and as shelters for livestock.

'Before all of the trouble there used to be a school here.... One of my sons, and my daughter used to attend it. When we were away, the children did not get the chance to get to school, as there were none. There is no longer a school here: it was destroyed in the fighting⁴.' 35 year old woman

What Children experience in School

Only about 20% of children of school age in Ethiopia actually attend school, and the percentage is even lower for children living in Region 5 (For some of the reasons, see Box 1). Inside the few schools that are functioning, children struggle to learn. Teaching materials and text books are in short supply, and most are still written in Amharic - the former national language of instruction - even though the language of the majority of children in the region is Somali. Children often complain that they have to share one textbook among a large group of students, and spend significant time each day just looking for the few that are available. According to Ministry of Education (MoE) reports, only 40% of schools in Ethiopia had textbooks in 1992, and the national student-book ratio was 4:1⁵. In one of the schools visited for this review, students said they had not seen any textbooks the entire school year.

Teachers also face difficulties trying to teach. At the start of the regionalisation process, teachers had little or no formal training: the Regional Education Bureau (REB) estimated that at least 75% of primary school teachers in Region 5 had no formal qualifications⁶. As a result, many teachers understandably could not teach well: they didn't prepare lesson plans, they didn't use teaching aids, and they didn't check to see that students understood the lesson. Outside of Jijiga town, teachers receive salaries irregularly and are poorly motivated. Many do not come to school, or if they do, they come late. Some come to school, but do not show up to class. In one of the schools visited, students reported that the behaviour of their teachers was so poor - they smoked in class, insulted and fought amongst one another - that outsiders wouldn't be able to differentiate between them and the students!

National Policy and Decentralisation

Following the overthrow of the Dergue regime in 1991, a new Federal system was created which grants autonomy and substantial administrative authority to nine regional states, constituted on the basis of ethnic and linguistic criteria. The creation of a federal system has huge implications for the delivery of services, which historically have been highly centralised.

Box 1: Schools - what are the problems?

A Community Management Workshop in Jijiga Zone in December 1997, listed the following as major problems:

- poor condition of schools
- lack of school facilities such as water tanks, latrines and fencing
- shortage of educational materials such as desks, windows, doors and textbooks
- shortage of teachers in rural areas
- shortage of classrooms in bigger towns, and lack of secondary schools
- lack of rooms for pedagogical centres in rural schools
- need for material supply and follow-up of school pedagogical centre activities
- poor students' attendance
- high work load at home for children
- early marriage for girls
- poor relationships between teachers, parents committee, administration, head teacher and REB

In the education sector, major policy changes under regionalisation include:

- using the majority language of the region as the language of instruction, enabling the majority of children to learn in their mother tongue
- decentralisation of central ministry services (e.g., curriculum development, materials production, educational radio production, adult education)
- reorganisation and decentralisation of systems of management and administration⁷.

Box 2: The Central State - Changing concepts of schooling

The history of education provision in Ethiopia is one of sweeping changes and reforms. Ethiopia has a long history of religious education (both Christian and Muslim) but modern education was only introduced as recently as the early 1900s. The emergence of central state authority, the arrival of diplomats and missions from abroad, and the growing demand for foreign languages increased the demand for modern education. Emperor Menelik II launched the first official government policy for the expansion of the education sector. From 1935-45, the Italian occupation resulted in the massacre of 3,000 educated Ethiopians and the introduction of the Italian education system. After 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie took forward the expansion of education, introducing secondary and tertiary education and establishing the first long-term plan to deliver primary education to all children.

The imperial regime was overthrown in 1974 and replaced by the Dergue, a socialist, military regime. Under the Dergue the education system was reformed to produce 'socialist citizens with all-round personalities', emphasising education for production, education for socialist consciousness, and education for scientific enquiryⁱ. This Marxist approach to education gave priority to mass education and communities in rural areas were mobilised to finance and construct schools. This campaign resulted in a rapid expansion of enrolment, particularly in primary education in rural areas.

ⁱ. Initially, fourteen new regional states were created

However, the increase in pupil enrolment was not matched by an increase in quality, which has declined steadily over the past two decades. Falling quality has been linked primarily to a decline in per student expenditure, scarcity of instructional materials and facilities, and inappropriate curriculum and teaching methodsⁱ. According to a recent research report: The curriculum lacked relevance with no clearly defined objectives, and instruction concentrated more on theoretical knowledge with little connection to daily life. The approach also had a high tendency towards rote learning which did not prepare young people for living in the community'.

Table: Regionalisation - who does what?

Area of responsibility	Ministry of Education	Regional Education Bureau	Zonal Education Department

Policy	Proposes and contributes to national policy	Contributes to national policy, & makes plans for region on basis of national policy. Formulates regional policy.	Proposes plans to the REB
Standard setting	Sets standards	Implements standards	Implements standards
Examinations	Prepares national examinations	Implements and supervises national examinations	Implements and supervises national examinations
Curriculum	Sets curriculum for secondary and higher education; assists in preparation of other school curricula	Prepares primary and junior secondary curriculum	Provides feedback and implements curriculum
Inspection		Inspects schools	
Teachers	Sets standards and requires qualifications (above); posts secondary teachers to regions	Pays teachers; recruits teachers and trains primary teachers	Pays primary teachers; provides in-service training
Instructional materials	Bulk procurement	Provides text books and materials	Distributes materials
School establishment	Establishes higher education institutions; licenses private higher institutions; sets standards for institutions (above)	Establishes schools and junior colleges; licenses private schools	Establishes schools and vocational training centres
Data	Collates national school census data & assists in system development	Collates regional data	Compiles zonal data

Regionalisation also provides for an additional level of decentralised authority; the

woreda (or district) level of administration. Hence, the new administrative structure will comprise the centre, the regions, the zones, and the woredasⁱⁱ. The plan is for the administrative centre of each of these, as well as each school, to have a Pedagogical Centre to support the development of educational materials. There is provision in principle for budgets to be devolved to the school level, but this has as yet not happened.

- ii. There are currently 9 regions in Ethiopia, with about 55 zones and over 650 woredas. Each region has an Education Bureau (REB), each zone has a Zonal Education Department, and each woreda has a Woreda Education Office.

The central feature of the new policy is that the responsibilities and power of the Federal MoE have been greatly reduced. Under regionalisation, the main role for the MoE will be to determine national standards, while the other three levels will be responsible for their implementation. For example, under the new policy the MoE will be responsible for setting standards and required qualifications for teachers in all regions, while the regions will be responsible for recruiting, training and paying them⁸.

The limits of Regional Capacity

Regionalisation has undoubtedly opened up new opportunities. But it happened suddenly, with little preparation to build up local skills. There was little support or infrastructure at local level to enable the new authorities to put the new policies into practice. In a previously highly centralised system, the people who were suddenly given the authority to make important decisions or implement aspects of centrally determined education policy had themselves never had experience of that level of responsibility. To take advantage of the new arrangements required a sophisticated understanding of systems and budgetary processes. Budgets that were officially available to the regions were not forthcoming, and to extract them would require an ability to manoeuvre through a rapidly changing political context where relations between central and regional authority were often complicated by political/ethnic tensions.

These features took more extreme forms in the more remote regions. In Somali Region 5, they were further compounded by security problems and a history of border conflicts which had left much of the infrastructure (including many schools) destroyed and large concentrations of refugees and displaced people requiring resettlement. Given the poor legacy of investment, ensuring even the most basic provision of education has been difficult. The capacity of the Regional Education Bureau to deliver any kind of educational service is extremely weak. Management of education is affected by the paucity of local, skilled personnel and the high turnover of government officials. Offices in the more remote areas do not function. Budgets are low, or non-existent.

Schools and villages are widely scattered, yet there is little money in the budget for transport to enable officials to visit the schools for which they are responsible. For all these reasons, Region 5 lags behind others in many aspects of implementation of the new education policy and strategy, such as developing a new primary school curriculum and opening a Regional Teacher Training Institute.

In adapting to the new policy there have been particular problems associated with teacher employment and language of instruction. Under the Mengistu regime, primary education was in Amharic and secondary and tertiary education in English, with English taught as a subject from primary grade 3. The new policy allows for a diversity of languages of instruction at the primary level and the introduction of English as a subject from grade one. For the first time, the medium of instruction in primary schools is the language of the majority ethnic group. When the Somali language was chosen as the medium of instruction for primary schools in Region 5, more than 300 Somali speakers were recruited to teach in local schools. Unfortunately, this was done in haste, without properly screening for suitable candidates. Many of the teachers who were subsequently employed had never taught before, and did not know how to do basic things, like prepare a lesson plan, use teaching aids, or evaluate student's learning. Some of the teachers had little more than a primary education themselves.

The complexities of divided authority are shown up by a bizarre situation that has arisen out of the transition to a new school language. The issue is, what should become of the primary school teachers who were already in post but who do not know Somali? In contrast with the newly recruited Somali speaking teachers, the established teachers are Teacher Training Institute (TTI) trained, but are now only able to teach the few lessons a week of English or Amharic. Most do not live in the villages where they are allocated to teach and so (theoretically) journey out daily from Jijiga; in practice, they often do not turn up or are seriously late, their motivation dulled by their low workload. Yet as qualified teachers they are on full pay, whereas the unqualified Somali teachers, who now do the bulk of the teaching, have an ambiguous status. The initial solution to pay the Somali teachers at the level of new TTI graduates was not acceptable to the Ministry of Finance and ways of formalising their qualifications are being explored. Viewed from the point of making a rational use of resources, some decision to resolve this situation is clearly needed. But the REB does not have the power to resolve the issue since the role of setting standards (e.g. on teacher qualifications) is retained by the central Ministry. Nor do the regional officials (mainly Somalis) feel it politically advisable to raise the issue, because it could be interpreted as an attempt to oust non-Somali teachers. The situation thus remains: in a state of extreme scarcity of resources, there is an inefficient use of those little available.

The response

Working between Ground and Sky

Save the Children was already working in region 5 at the time when these far-reaching changes were introduced or expected to happen. Save the Children's experience here began in the early 1970sⁱⁱⁱ. From 1988 it has been working in five refugee camps in Jijiga zone with a mixed population of returnee refugees from Somali camps or those internally displaced due to civil strife. The agency's involvement in education began in 1994 when Save the Children commissioned a study of the camp populations to identify the constraints to their successful return home, and investigate how to support people who chose to settle in the areas surrounding the camps⁹. Lack of education was identified as a major constraint for those who wanted to return to their areas of origin, as educational facilities were much better in the camps than in the rural areas of Jijiga.

iii. Save the Children collaborated with the government to assess the severity of the 1973/74 famine. This led to the establishment of a nutrition surveillance programme, which developed into a long-term presence in the area when Save the Children intervened in the 1988 refugee emergency, setting up health and nutrition programmes.

Towards the end of that year, Save the Children and the Zonal Education Department jointly carried out a needs assessment of the educational sector, from which developed the current programme of work. The needs assessment highlighted a number of problems:

- The regional education structures were newly formed and scarcely functioning: there were few trained staff and a limited budget.
- More than 75% of teachers had no formal qualifications or training¹⁰. They had been recruited to respond to the urgent need to provide teaching in the Somali language, but recruitment had been done without adequate technical screening.
- Communities had not been involved in decisions affecting the delivery of educational services. As a result, during the chaos surrounding the fall of the Dergue regime, lack of ownership in the school system had led to the widespread looting and destruction of schools.

It became evident that one of the main stumbling blocks was the lack of communication between the new authorities and people in the community. In trying to help get the newly decentralised education systems in place, Save the Children has chosen to work at the interface between the 'Ground' - what children actually experience - and the 'Sky' - education policies and provision. The programme is not conceived as a set of 'Save the Children' activities, but as a series of supports to encourage more people to be actively

involved in learning what children and communities want from schools, what actually goes on in schools, solving the problems, and influencing the planning of school provision to be more appropriate to the needs of local children.

From participatory assessments of the issues facing schools, the following were selected as areas where support from Save the Children could contribute towards such processes:

- Providing support to regional officials on planning and supervision;
- Involving the community in what goes on in the school;
- Improving the school environment;
- Developing a training course for teachers to upgrade their teaching skills.

Two other priorities emerged after a review of the initial two-year phase of the programme and were incorporated into the next phase:

- Reaching children who aren't in school: participatory research on adapting schools to be more inclusive
- Supporting the Region to develop the Somali curriculum and Somali language textbooks.

What has been learnt, and how has it been used?

Through the years of Save the Children's involvement, children, parents, teachers, and education authorities have met together, expressed their problems and needs, discussed issues, and argued about possibilities. Linking all these activities is the assumption that one mechanism for improving schools is to encourage more sets of people to be involved; and specifically, that if adults in the community are given a framework for taking a more active role in their children's schooling, and can learn about the kinds of problems that children are experiencing, they will be in a position to use that information to improve what happens in schools. This is an assumption that could be said to apply anywhere, but its implications are particularly far-reaching in situations of severe resource constraints.

In April 1998 field research was conducted to gain a better understanding of these processes. The researchers aimed to learn:

- To what extent have Save the Children-supported activities created opportunities for more people to learn about and be involved in what

goes on in schools?

- Whether there has been an improvement in the quality of schooling, from
 - better planning and supervisory capacity among officials
 - more parental involvement
 - the skills-upgrading course for teachers
- What children and parents think about the changes that are still scheduled to happen under regionalisation, including the new curriculum.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from six primary schools over a period of two weeks, conducted by small teams who met periodically to record and classify results. A detailed checklist of questions was developed to guide interviewers, and responses were analysed to show:

- what people had learned about the problems children were experiencing in school;
- how this information is shared;
- what (if anything) they were doing to help address these needs.

The team of interviewers included regional and zonal officials, members of parents' committees, and students, making a total of eleven people external to Save the Children. In addition there were eight representatives from Save the Children and one representative from Radd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children.)^{iv}

^{iv}. For further details of the research methodology, see appendix A.

An important part of the methodology - new to many participants - was the central place given to asking children what they thought:

'We never used to ask children. We just talked to other adults and drew our own conclusions. When you ask the children, they tell you and you see it in a new way. For instance they say clearly, I don't want to be beaten'. Elizabeth Mekonnen, Save the Children Programme Officer

Findings from the review suggest that school children in Region 5 **do** benefit from more people knowing about, and being in a position to respond to, the problems that they face learning in school. Specifically, the findings suggest that children benefit by:

- having more people know about the problems they face;
- having more people (and more people at different levels in the system) share information about these problems;
- having more people available to try to address these problems;
- having more people available to check-up on what other people are doing to address these problems.

Because people with different roles in relation to the schools (such as officials, parents, students, and teachers) are learning more about what children are experiencing in school, there is more potential for action to be taken at different levels. This is not to say that everyone *does* take action: in some cases it was found that people were in a position to help solve problems that arose, but chose not to help, or were blocked by others in their attempts to assist.

The following sections highlight what has been learnt about the problems faced by children in the schools visited; and describe the mechanisms that have been created to encourage wider local involvement and sharing of information, so that these problems can be addressed.

Regional Officials: learning from users

A major component of Save the Children's activities has been to support the Regional Education Bureau (REB) to learn firsthand about the problems of schools in the region, as experienced by children, parents and teachers, so that this understanding can inform the Region's planning. Because of the severe resource constraints facing the REB, there is not the budget locally to cover the cost of visiting the schools within their area. One important mechanism adopted by Save the Children has been to provide the means in terms of vehicle and per diem to get regional officials out to visit the schools they manage. These have often had an immediate practical impact, enabling the officials to sort out specific problems (e.g. the practical difficulties for teachers of where and when they get paid), as well as serving the more general purpose of letting them talk with students and other members of the community to better understand what hampers the effectiveness of school provision.

Training and awareness activities for a core team of school supervisors have aimed at developing their planning, supervision and management skills so that they can genuinely support school heads and classroom teachers. Topics have included:

- how to get community members involved in planning discussions;

- how to improve communication between teachers and head teachers;
- how to collect base-line information about the schools for planning purposes.

Trips have also been organised to other regions for regional officials to see how the process of regionalisation is being implemented elsewhere and to get a comparative sense of provision in their region in relation to others. Through the combination of all these activities regional officials have been stimulated to consider:

- what features of life in Region 5 might inform the needs of the schools, and the broader school system;
- which national policies and procedures seem to work well at local level, and which do not.

The possibilities opened up by these activities have been enthusiastically received. As one official told the research team,

'We can only identify needs across schools if we go to the schools and see what the needs are.'

But the findings from the review also make it clear that lack of resources often stops people from acting once they become aware of a problem. One regional official admitted:

'I don't have the means to follow-up.'

If action is to be taken on some of the issues that have come up, donor funding will be required, though not necessarily large amounts. One outcome of the programme is that it has put regional officials in a stronger position to define for themselves and negotiate for the kinds of funding that **they** prioritise, based on their own analysis of the problems. For instance, REB officials pressed Save the Children to include in the second phase of the programme support for developing the new Somali curriculum, which had not initially been one of the areas Save the Children expected to get involved in, but which regional officials insisted was a priority, even though they recognised that they did not have the resources (human or financial) to implement it.

There is also evidence that being exposed to the views of children and parents has given regional officials the confidence to tailor national policies to local situations. For example, the REB issued a statement in response to guidance from the MoE that schools must not take in more than 45 students in Grade One. But in some zones in Region 5 this meant that so many children would be left out of school that parents went

to the region and complained - so despite the fact that reversing this decision would result in crowded classrooms the REB retracted this statement and suggested that all children be enrolled.

The Community and School Management

- *'Sometimes parents come to class, but they don't ask us anything' (student)* Prior to 1994, the government ran and managed schools. Although parent forums had an official place within the school structure, parents were not actively involved in educational planning, and did not generally feel as though the schools 'belonged' to them or to their community¹¹. Under the new education policy, roles and responsibilities of parents have been clarified and given new emphasis. Specific structures have been developed to allow community members to participate more broadly in school management and administration, including the formation of 'parents committees' (selected by other parents at the beginning of each academic year), 'school committees' (composed of parents and other interested members of the community) and 'education guidance committees' (composed of head teachers, parents, teachers, students and a representative from the local government administration).

Save the Children has been involved in helping to raise awareness about the role of parents in school planning and administration through organising workshops at community level. Efforts have focused on helping to activate a community management structure that had been set up by the national government. Save the Children has helped to formalise a forum for parents, elders, and local authorities to share information about - and work together to improve - different aspects of the school environment. A series of workshops has been held involving students, teachers, community leaders, parents and education officials to raise awareness about the importance of participating in educational planning and management, and to help clarify and better understand their roles and responsibilities in running the school. Follow-up activities have included helping parents set up parents' committees, identifying projects to rebuild or rehabilitate the school facilities, and helping parents to mobilise other members of the community to get these projects underway.

Improving the Learning Environment

- *'The classrooms were in complete disarray' (parent)* During transition, one of the first problems to be noted by members of the community was the poor state of the local schools. Consequently, a key component of Save the Children's education programme in Jijiga has been working to rehabilitate primary schools in the region, through joint efforts initiated by local communities. One of the functions of the parent's committees is to mobilise the community to contribute towards rebuilding the school. In all of the schools we visited the community had provided contributions like labour and raw

materials (such as sand and wooden poles) to build latrines, water tanks, new classrooms, and fences. In some schools the committees had been able to raise additional contributions, including funds for staff salaries and learning materials/teaching aids. In one community the local authorities were even persuaded to donate ten cents from every kilo sold of 'qat'^v to the school to ensure ongoing material support. Both students and parents in the schools we visited said that renovating the schools had helped to improve the learning environment.

^v. A local herb widely used as a stimulant

Part of this strategy involves raising the profile of the schools - both within and outside the local community - so that the conditions of the schools are more widely known. This involves documenting and sharing basic information about the schools, and creating opportunities for officials to visit the area to actually witness the environment and poor conditions for themselves. Seeing the situation often stimulates action. For example, when the Minister of Education visited the region a few years ago, she also visited one of the schools where the classrooms were being used as toilets. *'Everyone was embarrassed because the classrooms were in complete disarray'* one parent remarked. This collective embarrassment led to change: soon after the Minister's visit the community elected a parents' committee and began to raise funds to help renovate the school. In an unprecedented move, the zonal office donated several bags of cement.

What does Parental involvement achieve?

The committees are the main vehicle through which people not directly involved in the school system can learn more about and influence what goes on inside the school. *'Now parents feel comfortable with school activities'* students at one school said. All of the schools we visited had recently formed parents' committees, although participation in school activities varied widely between schools; from infrequent visits to handle major complaints to daily meetings with teachers and students to monitor classroom learning. In most of the schools parents played a key role in helping to resolve problems facing teachers and students, including problems that arose between these two groups. In our review, typical problems reported to parents by students included: late or absent teachers, wrongdoings by teachers, and bullying by other students. Typical problems raised by teachers were: lack of or late salary payments, and lack of teaching materials. Problems that could not be resolved by parents were usually reported to the school supervisor, who commonly visited the school once or twice each year.

*

TEACHERS AND PUPILS

Do Teachers come more regularly?

- *Why are we the ones going after the teachers?' (student)* Teachers can't teach if they don't come to school. Before Save the Children began the skill upgrading programme, getting teachers to come to school - and to class on time - was reportedly a common problem for children in Region 5. *'The teachers used to come when they wanted'* a student at one school told us candidly. Five out of the six schools we surveyed reported that teachers' attendance rates had generally improved over the past year, but a few schools still had a few problems with a few teachers, and getting teachers to come on time was a nagging issue in four schools. In another school, students said that they 'struggled' to get one of their teacher's to come to class, while students at a different school had even gone to one of their teacher's home to 'beg' her to return.

Findings suggest that teachers may not have been inspired to come to school regularly because they weren't always paid promptly for being there. However, the main reason why teachers didn't come to school consistently appears to be lack of awareness by people outside the schools that teachers weren't showing up, and lack of enforcement^{vi}. One strategy now being used in several of the schools we visited is establishing a system of joint reporting in which students and parents act as 'class monitors'. The role of the student monitor varied in each of the schools we visited, from simply taking attendance (of both teachers and students), to following up on cleanliness, reporting student illnesses, and monitoring the morning processional to raise the flag. Schools that had elected class monitors kept two kinds of records: daily attendance records that were maintained by the head teacher, and records for each period that were maintained by students, to help ensure that all periods were occupied every day.

^{vi} This problem was probably also related to weaknesses in school supervision, and lack of community involvement in school administration and management.

Schools that had the fewest problems with absent teachers actively monitored this information. More importantly, in those schools with the fewest problems, information about attendance was also monitored by people who did not work directly within the school system. For example, in the only school that did not report problems with absenteeism there was an active, three-way reporting system: students reported problems to members of the parents committee; committee members constantly asked students whether things had improved; and if they hadn't they reported this news back to the head teacher. In other schools, the more problems there were with teachers, the fewer the links' in the reporting chain.

When teachers don't attend school regularly, students are less inclined to show up. In one school where students said their teachers were frequently absent, students admitted

that they lacked discipline themselves, and usually *'disappeared to town'* if their teacher didn't show up. In most of the schools we visited, the same mechanisms that were being used to monitor teachers' attendance were also being used to monitor student's attendance. In this school, however, there were no reporting systems in place, so parents were not always aware that their children or the children's teachers were not in school.

Can they teach better?

- *Not all teachers are good - some get off the topic' (student)* Teachers now come to school more regularly, but can they teach? According to the students we surveyed, many of their teachers used to teach poorly because few of them had received any training. *'Our sports teacher used to give us a ball and remain behind, without giving us instructions'* students at one school said. Students in another school said that their teachers used to be *'uninterested in teaching'*. And our findings suggest that these teachers continued to teach poorly because few people (other than the students) *knew* that they were teaching poorly.

Tests were subsequently given to ensure that teachers had at least a 12th grade education. To help upgrade the teaching skills of those who had passed this qualification, Save the Children has supported a series of short-term training courses, focused on basic teaching methodologies and subject areas. Training courses in school management have also been developed for head teachers. Save the Children's contribution has been largely organisational and financial; the courses themselves have been run by Ethiopian educationalists, and the approach to both content and methodology have therefore been fairly traditional. Save the Children has also facilitated awareness-raising sessions on issues where they could draw on the organisation's wider experience, such as strategies for including children with disabilities.

Students in five schools say that there has been a 'great change' in classroom teaching since their teachers attended the training courses, and these improvements were only noted for teachers who had participated in the training programme. A central component of the training has been supporting teachers and administrators to learn more about the process of teaching and learning. Students say that their teachers now use a range of techniques to involve them in classroom activities, such as organising group discussions and school debates. They also prepare and integrate teaching aid materials into the lesson plans, and encourage students to choose and make their own learning materials. These changes were highly appreciated by the students. *'I understand when I make maps myself'* one student said. There is some evidence to suggest that these new methods have helped to improve the student's grades. Teachers in three schools also say that these methods have improved their own teaching skills.

With the advent of the parents committees, people outside the school now have the authority to visit the classrooms to monitor the teachers' performance. This gives parents and other community members the opportunity to witness problems for themselves. *'I sit in classes and I see'* one parent told us. *'I can tell if they are learning. If not, I follow it up.'* One of the things this parent found was that many of the Somali speaking students had difficulty understanding instructions given to them by their Amharic-speaking teacher. Since he understood both languages, he was able to act as a translator. *'Now the teacher asks if he doesn't know how to explain in Somali'*, the parent said. Sitting in on classes also gives students the opportunity to talk to parents and supervisors about problems they experience with individual teachers. For example, students in one school told a visiting supervisor that *'Some teachers just write on the blackboard and sit down without any explanation'*. Unfortunately, however, not all of the parents committees take the opportunity to sit in on classes or talk with students, and - according to the students - not all of their complaints have been addressed: in the case described above, the students said that there had been 'no response' from the supervisor about this issue.

Another component of the skill upgrading programme involved providing information about how to identify and work with children who have disabilities. Responses from teachers suggest that this information was illuminating, helping them to be more responsive to the needs of their students. For example, one teacher told us that - at first - he thought that one of his students who was deaf was slow. *'I saw that his attention was poor'*, the teacher said. *'I went to the back of the class and repeated the lesson and he understood, so I realised that the problem was his hearing. He wasn't slow. Now I put him up front near me during classes.'* Since the training, teachers in most of the schools now take different measures to assist students with disabilities: such as rearranging seating plans so that children with poor hearing and eyesight can sit up front; allowing children with physical disabilities more time to get to class; speaking louder, or writing larger on the blackboard; tutoring slower learners; and instructing other students to assist children with disabilities.

Teachers and the new School Language

- *'Some teachers are guests in our school'* (student) In 1994, the Somali language was chosen as the medium of instruction in schools in Region 5. For the majority of the groups we surveyed this was a very welcome change, because it meant that most children in the region could now *'easily understand what is learned'*. Students and parents were particularly vocal about the advantages of learning in their mother tongue: in two schools Somali-speaking teachers were even described as being the 'best' teachers in the school, simply because the children could understand them. However, in those schools and communities that were more ethnically diverse, reactions to the new choice of language were more subdued. Parents from a mixed community near Jijiga

town mentioned that the perception of the school among Somali speakers had improved as a result of this change, while it had declined for those who spoke other languages.

The decision to adopt Somali in schools affects many aspects of the school system, including staffing requirements (both in schools and local government), curriculum development, management and administration. Teachers who speak Amharic now have to learn to teach in a different language, and face being replaced by teachers who speak Somali: those who already do are in very short supply as described in the opening section. New textbooks need to be developed, and other materials need to be translated from Amharic. Because this decision has widespread implications, implementing the policy has been slow, and erratic. This has caused unique kinds of complications for students that are only beginning to be recognised and addressed. For example, national examinations were developed in Somali before the Somali textbooks were completed, so in one of schools we visited students had been taught in one language and set examinations in another. Teacher's guides are not likely to be ready in time to be distributed with the new texts. Staff hired to develop the radio programmes to supplement the primary curriculum do not have sufficient resources to complete them, so students may be examined on material they haven't yet learned.

In the majority of schools we visited, problems related to language were being raised and addressed through the parents' committees. The earlier example of a parent fluent in both languages volunteering time to help in lesson translation is a good illustration of the practical benefits of parental involvement. In another school, parents responded to student complaints about the arrival of examinations in Somali by requesting zonal officials to send the exams back in Amharic 'so that children's performance wouldn't suffer'.

Teachers and Discipline

- ***'Teach our teachers not to punish us' (student)*** In one of the schools we visited, students reported that the behaviour of their teachers was so poor - they smoked in class, insulted and fought amongst one another - that outsiders wouldn't be able to differentiate between them and the students! Our findings suggest that disciplinary problems among teachers (and in two cases with head teachers) had been an issue for most of the schools we visited, but had largely been resolved by removing the principal offenders. In most cases these problems were well known to people both inside and outside the schools, but were seen to be too great to be resolved internally. The majority of cases were subsequently resolved by local education officials, but in one instance the offenders had to be disciplined by the local police. In the majority of schools we visited parents and head teachers said that teachers were now more self-disciplined in school. A representative from the zonal bureau even said that he had noticed that teachers were better behaved outside the school: for instance, they paid more attention to personal hygiene (combed their hair, wore smart clothes), and no longer chewed qat in public.

A more troubling issue for children is how teachers discipline them. Students in half of the schools reported that at least some of their teachers punish them physically, although this was not confirmed by parents or teachers in one of these schools. According to some of the students, some teachers routinely 'slapped and kicked' them, made them sit in painful positions 'holding our ears', and beat them over the head with books or sticks. There was substantial evidence from the review that children did not prefer this style of discipline. Children in one school labelled this kind of punishment 'abuse', and children in another school said that the way they were punished was 'severe'. Eight out of eleven students we surveyed in one school said that they preferred to be given advice rather than be beaten. However, statements from regional and zonal supervisors suggest that physical punishment is still widely accepted and practised in schools. ***'How can a child learn without a stick?'*** one teacher asked a school supervisor during a routine visit.

Findings suggest that the use of physical punishment has decreased since the beginning of the training course, and that participants on this course have begun to discover how children can learn without being beaten. In one school children said that there was a great difference between teachers who had and had not attended the course, in terms of the way they were treated. Similar statements were made by parents in another school. Both groups said that the teachers who had attended the course were 'better teachers' because they didn't beat their students. Teachers in half the schools we surveyed said that they used other methods to discipline children, such as talking with and advising them, giving them extra chores on the school compound, speaking with their parents, and expelling them from school. Neither head teachers nor parents in these schools reported significant behavioural problems with students, suggesting that students did in fact respond to these methods

One of the mechanisms suggested during the training course to address discipline problems in school was to create school disciplinary committees composed of students, teachers, head teachers and parents. Two of the schools reported that they had established such committees, and two others indicated that they had some sort of reporting system in place. These structures appear to be very valuable channels through which children can keep tabs on each other's behaviour - both inside and outside the school. In one school, just having a committee appears to have raised students confidence: ***'we know we have the right to be heard'*** a student told us. Students also said that because they were involved in the committees, they could report quarrels that occurred outside the school grounds. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was a strong negative correlation between the use of physical punishment and the use of disciplinary committees: in schools where teachers did not beat students, active reporting mechanisms or formal discipline committees were in place.

Teacher-pupil relationships

• *Some teachers leave and go out without saying anything'* (student) Although the majority of teachers do not beat their students, students in a few schools still felt that some of their teachers 'lacked respect' for them, by making rude remarks, 'mocking' them, or otherwise treating them unfairly. In one school a student reported that this behaviour was more pronounced in interactions between teachers and children with disabilities: *'Some teachers treat children with disabilities differently'* he told the research team. Another student in this school said that teachers had more respect for the girls than they did for the boys, because the girls were 'quieter'.

Findings suggest that students want better relationships with their teachers. *'Teachers shouldn't see us as their enemies.'* a female student at this same school told us. *'They should try to understand us.'* Some students say they try to be better understood by reporting incidents to the school disciplinary committee, the parents' committee, their head teacher, or the school supervisor. But in most cases this behaviour was not reported.

Relationships appear to have improved when teachers learned more about the nature of childhood and adolescence provided through the summer training course. *'We learned how to handle students better because of the child psychology'* one teacher said. The head teacher at this school remarked that after this course the teachers in his school were more aware of the 'life situation' of the students because they were more sensitive to the children's needs. They paid more attention to what was bothering them, tried to find out if they were sick, hungry, or having problems at home. One teacher described how this information helped him to assist a student at his school:

'There is a slow learner in Grade 3. I tried to provide additional assistance, but she was not improving. Then I asked about her family background and found that she lives with her elderly grandmother and she is very poor. I brought her case to the attention of the head teacher and the school agreed not to collect money from the family.'

Students in one school also said that those teachers who had gone on the training course treated them with greater respect than teachers who had not been on the course. *'The trained teachers thank us at the end of class, so we know the class is over'* a student explained. Other teachers simply walk out, leaving the students confused. *'We even think he may come back, but he doesn't.'*

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A RESPONSIVE SCHOOL SYSTEM?

The New Curriculum

- ***'It is not our culture' (student)*** There is significant anticipation about the new primary curriculum currently being developed for Region 5, which will be written in the Somali language and seeks to reflect Somali lifestyle and culture. Each region is responsible for developing primary school textbooks, teacher's guides, and supplementary materials in a majority language for children in grades one through six. The MoE sets national standards for the curriculum by providing an outline of the syllabus and objectives in each subject area. These outlines are then used by the regions to emphasise local situations, culture and lifestyle. For practical reasons, the books are being prepared in stages: in Region 5 textbooks have been developed for Grades 1 and 5, and those for Grades 2 and 6 are currently being written. Save the Children has helped to train curriculum developers in technical production and provide funds for their salaries.

Most of the people surveyed - including the majority of students - were aware that a new curriculum was in the process of being developed, and had similar ideas about what they hoped it would include. Their comments also illustrated what they didn't like about the current curriculum. Their primary objection was that the old curriculum didn't reflect Somali culture and religion. This was expressed in different ways. Several groups described items in the textbook as being 'unfamiliar' to people in the region, such as different kinds of food, household articles, and different styles of architecture. Other things were described as being 'inappropriate' culturally, like illustrations of a woman wearing shorts, and a picture of someone washing a dog. The absence of Somali images - pastoral scenes of herders, pictures of mosques, and the use of Somali names and stories - was mentioned by groups in almost every school. While groups in two of the schools said that it was equally important to learn about things outside Somali culture, respondents clearly wished to see more of their own history and culture represented in the texts, and learn more about their surrounding environment.

Community responses to new concepts

- ***'We only see pictures of girls in home economies' (student)*** The involvement of outside agencies in discussions about curriculum raises new issues about responsiveness. UNICEF has had a role in framing the centrally designed curriculum, Save the Children in framing questions to ask communities in Region 5. Both have a child rights perspective, which leads them to raise issues that are in some senses age-old (e.g. gender), but are raised in new ways that may not be seen as relevant by local communities. How have the communities responded to such questions?

On issues of gender and disability students' statements indicated that they were open to new ideas about how the curriculum could reflect all children's potential involvement in

schools. They wished to see a balanced representation of males and females in the textbooks, and positive portrayals of people with disabilities. The current lack of a 'gender balance' was reported in five out of the six schools we surveyed (in the sixth school children said that they didn't have any books, so therefore couldn't comment about what they contained). Two schools reported that their texts contained more pictures of men than women, and teachers in one school reported that male names were used more frequently than female names. Groups in two schools also expressed concern about the way in which females were portrayed: for example, girls in one school said that pictures of females were only found in the home economics subject. Similarly, teachers in four schools observed that people with disabilities had not been adequately portrayed in the old curriculum and said that there should be illustrations of disabled children playing and learning alongside children who do not have disabilities.

- ***'We have nothing to do with AIDS' (parent)***

The question of HIV/AIDS was much more contentious, touching as it does on areas that most people do not speak about even outside school. While information about AIDS will be included in the new national syllabus (and is already the topic of a national radio programme), teachers and parents we spoke to in Region 5 were divided as to what aspects of this subject should be taught, and by whom, and there is concern about the way in which information will be presented in the classroom. Teachers in four of the schools we visited reported that this is a subject they now teach following Save the Children supported training in HIV/AIDS; usually alongside other health issues, and with the assistance of local health personnel. Teachers in another school said they did not apply what they learned in the training in the classroom, because they felt it would encourage children to have sexual intercourse, and they felt that primary school children were too young to learn about the issue (however, the head teacher in this school reported that children do learn about HIV through the national radio programme!).

While there was general agreement among the adults we interviewed that children should be informed about the *effects* of the disease in school, overall, parents were more likely to say that information about transmission and *methods of prevention* should be left to them or to religious educators, or not taught at all. ***'We have nothing to do with AIDS'*** one parent remarked ***'we have the Holy Quran'***. A parents' committee member in another school said, ***'Learning about condoms in school is not good. Religion allows us to teach this and how to prevent it'***. In contrast, children generally appeared to be comfortable with the level and type of information that they were getting about HIV in school, particularly in those schools where students were also actively involved in disseminating messages about the disease.

Since the textbook that will include this subject has not yet been written, Save the

Children and the REB are currently exploring ways to bring people together to discuss how this can be done sensitively. Overall, the findings suggest that issues about what children are or should be learning in school have not yet been actively raised in general forums and discussion groups. During the review it became clear that members of the community had not had a formal opportunity to influence what would go into the new curriculum, but wished to help determine what children would learn in school.

Why are children not in school?

Save the Children's initial activities have aimed at improving the quality of what goes on in schools; this is therefore what the review questions also emphasised. But the majority of children in Region 5 do not attend school; because they have to work, their parents won't allow them to go, school is too far away, or a multitude of other reasons. [Box 3 gives the reasons that people gave for this].

More recent Save the Children activities have been directed towards trying to understand the kinds of changes in the pattern of school provision that might increase access possibilities for children. One group of issues relates to children in families with a pastoral life style. Participatory research in pastoral areas has highlighted the significant fact that while relatively few children of pastoralists attend formal school, almost all children (and a large percentage of girls) attend at least a few years of Koranic school. There are at least three reasons why this is so: 1) Koranic schools are mobile, and move with communities at certain times of the year; 2) the school day is flexible, and organised around children's work day (Koranic schools typically open in the early evening, for example, when children have returned from grazing animals); and 3) the community values the kind of education that Koranic schools provide (such as knowledge of the Quran, and basic literacy in Arabic) so they help make it possible for children to attend, for example by constructing ponds for water use by students.

In some places, basic literacy and numeracy have been incorporated into the Koranic school curriculum. These initiatives suggest an alternative model of schooling that bridges the gap between, and tries to maintain the best qualities of, both Koranic and formal schools. Save the Children is now working with the REB in Region 5 to see whether some of the features of Koranic schools can be more widely introduced so that girls and children of pastoralists have a greater chance to attend school.

Do improved schools attract more children?

- *'We are waiting for you and Allah' (child, not in school)* Another approach to the question of access is to consider the effects of school improvements on enrolment patterns. There is a common perception that more parents would encourage their children to be in school if they felt school was useful to them. The review sought to

discover whether there had been a perceived change of this kind in Region 5, and also the extent to which members of the community were helping to raise awareness about the plight of children who were not in school.

Four of the schools we visited reported increases in enrolment over the past year. Groups attributed increases in enrolment to two main factors: efforts by parents to raise awareness about the value of education, and overall improvements in school facilities. A central role of the parents' committees is to motivate other parents to send their children to school. *'We tell them to bring their children'* one parent said. *'We tell them that education can bring them out of darkness.'* In most schools parents said they went about this by talking with other parents, and in two schools parents said they also helped other students financially. Students reported that these efforts had helped to change parent's attitudes towards schooling; particularly their attitudes toward the value of schooling for girls. *'Parents know that girls may marry and divorce and come back to the family uneducated, so they had better have their own skills and education'* one student said. Physical renovations appeared to have both direct and indirect effects on enrolment. Students in one school said that enrolment had increased because there were better facilities within the school like latrines and water tanks. Teachers said that renovations had improved the learning environment by providing better protection from harsh weather, and causing fewer distractions on the school compound. Two schools reported that enrolment had increased for specific groups of children who had particular problems getting to school: girls; children of pastoralists; children with disabilities; children who are very poor; and over-age children. *'Students who weren't here before have come back'* one student said. One girl mentioned that it had been possible for more children to come to school because of the recent federal exemption from paying school fees^{vii}. Another girl said that the reason for the increase in female enrolment in her school was that girls were now able to 'plan work around school' due to introduction of shift systems: one month they went in the afternoons, one month they went in the mornings.

vii. Under regionalisation, responsibility for financing primary and junior secondary education has been devolved to the regions. While official school fees have been banned by the central MoE, schools and communities will still be expected to supplement operational budgets for infra- structural improvements through income generation activities (USAID, 1993)

While enrolment increased in the majority of schools we surveyed, two schools reported that certain groups of children (girls and students in higher grades) were more likely to drop out earlier than other children. Girls had a tendency to drop out when they reached maturity - around the age of 13 or 14. One school had attempted to address this by establishing a 'girls-only' class for Grade 2, but found that this wasn't very effective. Parents in two schools reported that the lack of a junior school in the

area was a disincentive for children who made it through to the higher grades: since there was nowhere to go when they graduated, finishing the last few years of school was less important. Parents in one of these schools said they are now lobbying for a new school to be built.

Box 3: What keeps children out of school?

Only about 20% of children of school age in Ethiopia actually attend school, and the percentage is even lower for children living in Region 5. One factor is the long distance to school, particularly in the more rural areas, where classes for children in upper primary grades are often non-existent. Some children in these areas have access to schools for grades 1-3, but then have to walk long distances to attend higher grades, and travel even farther to attend high school. In the town of Heregale, for example, once children complete grade three the closest school available to them is 12 km (or 2 hours walking distance) away. The only high school available is located in the regional capitol, Jijiga: because of the long distance to this city (42 kms) most children will be forced to drop out at this stage: others who are more fortunate will have to spend the weekday or semester with relatives in town and then return to their villages over the weekend or when school closes.

Another factor is time. Because children are closely involved in the agro-pastoral activities of their families, many are unable to combine learning at formal schools with their household responsibilities. A primary feature of pastoral life is mobility: moving with the seasons to find water and grassland for herds. Depending on the degree of pastoralism, most children of school age are expected to accompany elders during periods of migration. The main migratory period, called the 'jilaal' dry season, typically occurs between October and March each year. Since children also assist in agricultural activities in April, their ability to attend formal primary schools is limited from May to September. However, during this five month period children have a different set of obligations that also limit the amount of time they have for school. Both boys and girls, for example, are expected to herd animals, sow crops, and collect firewood, while girls are also expected to collect water, prepare food and sell milk. Some children are also involved in wage labour, either as domestic labourers in towns, or as paid herders.

'My youngest son does go to... school here. He is ten years old, and in addition to his schooling he is looking after the cattle of my son-in-law. My older son is too busy to go to school, he helps my son-in-law with the farming.'ⁱ 35 year old woman

Girls are particularly disadvantaged in the current system, with few attending - even in the early years - and high drop out rates throughout the primary cycle. In Jijiga zone, available statistics show that 28% of children enrolled in primary school are

girls, falling to 17% at secondary levelⁱ. The reasons for low girl enrolment are complex and cultural, closely connected to the heavy domestic responsibilities of girls and their future role as wives.

*'There is no school in this village, if there was one then I would like to go. There is a Koranic school, but my parents don't let me go, I don't know why. Everyone can go to the school, but as they get older, the girls are too busy to carry on'*ⁱ 9 year old girl

Children with disabilities face similar challenges. One consequence of the ensuing conflict and of poor health conditions in the region is the large number of children with traumatic disorders and physical disabilities. The majority of poor families cannot afford the mobility aids that might make it easier for children with disabilities to attend school, so many are simply kept at home.

What has been learnt?

The effect of local involvement

The benefits of involving a wide range of people in the design and development of local education are complementary, with effects at different levels multiplying together to bring greater improvements for children. Information and ideas about problems and solutions are shared across the system; people with power to act at different levels of the system begin working together to achieve change, and others bring in different kinds of resources from their various backgrounds. Finally, it is important to have a variety of people at different levels with an interest in checking up on what others are doing to resolve the problems.

Making a reality of the possibilities of decentralisation

The new national policy of decentralisation provides a framework for community involvement, by giving people the authority and leverage to respond to challenges at different levels. However, it does not automatically lead to more community-responsive education: because of resource and capacity constraints, regionalisation created significant new problems, alongside new opportunities. In particular, officials at regional and zonal levels, as well as teachers themselves, lacked the experience to take on new roles expected of them.

Participatory frameworks need to be created at all levels within the school system - and connections made between them - if benefits are to reach children in schools. Unless responsive mechanisms are created all the way down to classroom level - and children allowed to be part of those mechanisms by providing their own version of events -

people responsible for managing schools won't have the proper information on which to act.

Linking providers and users

Seeing what children experience allows officials at regional level to tailor national policies to local situations. In Region 5 regional officials are using their broadened view of the education process and a base of information informed by local realities to begin to shape the school system around the needs of the local community.

The importance of children's own perspectives

Children's views have had a significant effect in challenging adult's perspectives on the purpose of education and on methods used in schools. Perhaps because children are not traditionally consulted, their ideas have had a greater impact through providing a fresh vision: for example, many adults in the community were simply unaware that there were problems with teaching methods and teachers' behaviour in schools. Children's own descriptions of their experiences in school made this rapidly clear. Children were also much more open to contentious innovations (such as education on HIV/AIDS) than adults had expected.

A facilitating role for external agencies

External agencies can help to create responsive frameworks by helping people get the information on which to act, and by helping to provide the resources for people to act on what they find. Though lack of resources often stops people from acting once they become aware of a problem, meaningful contributions do not have to be large: in Region 5, Save the Children began with small-scale, well-targeted and relatively low-cost interventions (like funding the cost of transport, exchange visits and teacher training) that could foreseeably be within the reach of the government's education budget.

The style of international NGO work

The review concentrated on processes that had been stimulated among local people, and did not ask participants to comment on the role played by the international NGO in facilitating these processes. But there are some pointers from the experience in Region 5 as to what factors may have contributed to the generally positive results.

- Before the start of the programme Save the Children had considerable knowledge of the area and culture, built up through work in other sectors.

- Management of the programme rested in the hands of local Save the Children staff, who built up relations of trust with both communities and government.
- Save the Children staff was genuinely concerned to support local processes rather than control them, and did not see themselves as experts on education, but rather as facilitators of a process whereby local groups would become increasingly proficient. Communities and officials were centrally involved in planning, prioritising, implementation and evaluation.
- The programme offered a medium-term involvement in the development of better schooling rather than short discreet inputs, and developed organically in response to what was continually being learnt about the specific nature of the problems to be tackled.

Editors' Conclusions

- Decentralisation of authority within the school system needed to be accompanied by support to build the capacity of officials and teachers to take on new roles.
- Save the Children provided support for planning and supervision, curriculum development, adapting teacher training courses, sharing experience across regions, and facilitating systems for community involvement. These low cost interventions could be undertaken within resource-constrained government budgets, with a disproportionately high impact on the quality of schooling.
- Mother-tongue teaching was one of the most important factors in making school worthwhile for children. But simply recruiting Somali-speaking teachers (to meet policy requirements), without addressing their lack of understanding of basic teaching methods, failed to solve the problems children experienced in schools.
- The participatory evaluation of the programme involved a wide variety of groups with an interest in education. Their ideas and perspectives were fundamental to the schools' success.
- Before training, many teachers were unaware of children's diverse needs; similarly, before asking the children their opinions, many adults had no idea that there were problems with teachers' behaviour and teaching methods.
- Capacity-building has an impact not only locally, but also puts regional education officials in a stronger position to define for themselves the needs of their region, and to negotiate for the kinds of funding they prioritise based on their own analysis.

Notes

¹ Parker, B., 1995. Ethiopia: Breaking New Ground, Oxfam Country Profile, Oxfam, Oxford

² Save the Children, 1997. 'Evaluation of Community Resettlement and Reintegration Programme Activities', internal report, Save the Children, Ethiopia

³ Penrose, P. 1996. 'Budgeting in the Education Sector in Ethiopia', unpublished report commissioned by Department for International Development

⁴ Save the Children 1997

⁵ USAID, 1993. DeStefano, J. (et al), 'Ethiopia Education Sector Review, Part II', Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

⁶ Save the Children, 1998. 'Proposal for Banyan Tree Foundation: Basic Education Support Programme in Somali National Regional State, Ethiopia', internal report, Save the Children

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⁸ Penrose 1996

⁹ Farah, 1994. Internal report, Save the Children

¹⁰ Save the Children 1998

¹¹ Save the Children 1998

Listen to those who use the schools - Civil society and education policy - A case study from Peru



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What are the problems for children?

The provision of state education in Peru has expanded steadily since the 1950s. Basic education provision was seen as an essential part of the state-led development approach of successive governments and achieved rising enrolment figures and falling levels of illiteracy. Nevertheless, these achievements were eroded during the 1980s and early 1990s by the reduction in real terms in education spending as a result of population increase, economic crisis and structural adjustment policies.¹ Education expenditure as a proportion of GDP stood at 3.2% in 1970 falling to 2.22% in 1980 and made a weak recovery to 2.86% in 1996. whereas annual expenditure per pupil declined by 78% in real terms in the period 1970 to 1990.²

Although education spending has recovered somewhat in recent years (including increased investment in education by the World Bank), there have been growing concerns about the relevance, quality and effectiveness of primary education provision given increasing rates of drop-out and repetition of school years. For example, the repetition rate for primary schools was 14% in 1991 rising to 21% in 1996.

The changing political and socio-economic climate in Peru has impacted on attitudes to education as well as the ability of families to access the education on offer. The prolonged economic crisis, combined with the effects of internal conflict (the terrorist

MRTA and Sendero Luminoso movements of the 80s and early 90s) have put strain on family survival strategies as poverty, displacement and rural-urban migration have increased. Where family income is falling or becoming less secure, children not only need to work to supplement family incomes, but also seek a wider range of practical skills and experiences which will ensure a livelihood in the future. In this context, a traditional, academic approach to education seems less relevant or useful to children.

A diagnosis of primary education in 1993 (carried out by World Bank, UN Development Programme, German Technical Assistance, UNESCO and the Ministry of Education)³ concluded that state education provision was deteriorating and highlighted 4 main characteristics of this decline:

- lack of basic facilities and materials, and inadequate teaching methods in schools;
- low teachers' salaries (leading to a situation where the profession is demoralised, new recruits are less well qualified and teacher training standards are falling);
- inefficient and over-bureaucratic financial and administrative management;
- breakdown of Ministry of Education capacity to operate at a national level (sphere of influence to the metropolitan area of Lima/Callao).

There are strong links between the changing political and socio-economic context and the deterioration in effective education provision. The above diagnosis identified a number of key factors which, over the previous two decades, had impacted on education provision:

- population explosion and rapid increase in demand for educational provision
- public finances did not increase in line with the increase in coverage of schools
- changes in national political situation which reduced traditional democratic structures and practices in favour of a more centralised and authoritarian style of government which was reflected in educational policymaking

- economic crisis leading to a drastic programme of stabilisation and structural adjustment policies demanded by international monetary organisations which impacted negatively on social spending and policies including education
- the growth of the terrorist organisation Sendero Luminoso which had an important influence in the teaching profession. Teachers and educationalists viewed with suspicion by the state
- institutional weakness within the Ministry of Education due to the restructuring of the state apparatus and the departure of the most able and qualified civil servants to the private sector.
- lack of continuity in the Ministry of Education: 7 changes of minister in 5 years and resulting constant change in policies (training, school texts, curriculum, structure of MoE etc.)

Education policymakers at the national level, as well as the World Bank, have recognised that state education is currently failing many children, and educational reform is under way. Initially, this process was predominantly based on analysis gathered by consultants working for the Ministry of Education or World Bank. It resulted in an education policy between 1990 and 1995 which focused on school construction and a management reform programme which sought to decentralise funding by providing state funding per pupil at school. The policy was later abandoned due to strong opposition from teachers, unions, educationalists, the church and public opinion, concerned about the quality of education. During this period the majority of World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) social credits for education were spent on construction projects, including a high-profile schools construction programme in the run up to the 1995 presidential election.

Since 1995 there has been a major shift in education policy including: a wide-ranging reform of the overall education system (pre-school to tertiary); addressing issues of quality in primary schools; training of teachers and school managers. This fundamental change of approach was due in part to increased World Bank funding for primary education and improved institutional stability within the Ministry of Education. In addition, as explored in the following sections, the increased role of civil society in identifying educational needs and developing appropriate policy responses has been an important factor in this process of change.

The origins of 'Foro Educativo'

Foro Educativo has its origins in a Save the Children seminar, 'Human Development

and Education', organised in June 1992 by a group of educationalists and other members of civil society who shared a concern about the quality and relevance of state education, and a conviction that a more effective and responsive education system was fundamental to social development. The very factors which had contributed to the decline of the education system also conspired against an NGO-led response of this kind, as severe recession, violence, and political crisis polarised Peruvian society and put NGOs in a precarious position vis-a-vis the government:

'1992 was the worst year in Peru's political history in the last half of the century. Shining Path, Fujimori's coup d'etat, recession; all those factors make the political environment fragile and highly unstable. Despite all this, (here was) a small group of people coming from the spectrum of the political rainbow and involving themselves in a seminar to discuss long term policies for education! It was a groundbreaking experience after years of biased partisanism, in that most of the NGOs were still hard line supporters of 'popular education' (i.e. non-formal education).' Ricardo Villanueva, Save the Children Peru Coordinator

An outcome of this seminar was the establishment of Foro Educativo, originally set up as a think-tank of educationalists working in both the state and non-governmental sectors with the objective of identifying educational needs and making concrete recommendations for state education reform. The creation of this new NGO was based on the conviction that in order to develop and put into practice effective educational reform, it was essential to promote wider participation of members of 'civil society' in educational analysis and policymaking. As its work developed, Foro Educativo also evolved into a national network through which actors at all levels (educationalists, NGOs, teachers, school directors and students) were encouraged to form an alliance and participate in educational policy debate and policymaking. This has now been formalised within Foro Educativo's structure in that it operates both as a national network and as a research/influencing NGO with a core team of paid professionals who conduct research, produce publications, and develop the network. The NGO is managed by an elected committee made up of members of the Foro Educativo network.

The consensus leading to the initial seminar and subsequent creation of Foro Educativo grew out of an existing dialogue within an already established civil society including educationalists and NGOs, both national and international. Save the Children's decision to fund both the original seminar and the establishment of Foro Educativo as an NGO was based on existing contacts; the then Save the Children Deputy Director was one of the original group who conceived and organised the 1992 seminar and took the initiative forward to establish a permanent forum. It is this ongoing dialogue with key educationalists which led to a shared outlook and approach to improving the quality of state education in Peru, and the initial consensus on which the work of Foro Educativo

has been based (this is explored more fully below under The role and development of an education forum').

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CONSTRAINTS TO EDUCATION POLICY-MAKING

An essential part of Foro Educativo's work has been to reflect upon and analyse the educational context (social, cultural and political as well as economic) within which they, and the policymakers in government, operate. This section looks at factors identified by Foro Educativo as determining the educational context and limiting the development of 'relevant' educational policies which can respond more effectively to children's needs. This interpretation has been developed (and continues to be debated) through discussion, research and analysis by the core team of Foro Educativo with input from the other members of the network (the mechanisms for ensuring wide participation in this process are explored later under The role and development of an education forum).

The purpose of education

The purpose of the Peruvian state education system has traditionally been seen in terms of producing good citizens who will contribute to and benefit Peruvian society. This view has been reflected at all levels, by policymakers, teachers and parents:

'The main characteristic for a relevant education is that it should contribute to local development... an education system which prepares the student to play an active role in the local economy' Teacher in Piura

'In general, parents in rural areas do not want their children to have the kind of education they had. They want changes in the education system, but they see it more in terms of a child going through the formal education system in order to benefit the family; for example, whether they will come out better prepared to be good fishermen...'
Teacher in Piura

While this view of the purpose of education is legitimate, it often differs from the views of children themselves: *'We have our dreams and plans, but the teachers don't let us carry them out'* (Girl in Piura). An education which focuses solely on preparation for future economic development at the local and national levels tends to ignore the present reality, needs and dreams of the subjects of the education system, the children themselves. This approach implies that children's own personal development and their current social role (as *children*) is less important than, and even unconnected to, their

future role as productive adults.

Through a series of papers developed in consultation with all levels of civil society, Foro Educativo has been able to challenge this traditional Peruvian view of the purpose of education, defining a relevant education as one which places emphasis on the reality of children's present as well as their future opportunities.

Centralised planning/national diversity

A perspective which sees education principally in terms of preparing future citizens for their role in national society also begs the question of how this 'national society' is defined. Given the diversity and complexity of Peruvian society, and the rapid changes under way, it is impossible to define a single, homogenous vision of national identity, culture and society. An exclusive focus on an abstract future 'goal' characterised by uniform national identity and aspirations has hindered the development of a relevant educational system which is able to respond to the differing realities of children's experience and opportunities:

*'They still make the mistake of planning from Lima, without considering that there are different places and environments, and therefore different adults and children... urban interests are completely different from rural interests, and the perspective of a child on the coast is completely different to the perspective of a child in the mountains or the jungle: so it's very easy for the planner to focus on an area of certainty such as knowledge, rather than looking at wider individual development because this is too abstract.'*ⁱ Interview with President of the Piura regional education network

ⁱ Piura is a northern coastal city which was heavily affected by the 'el niño' storms.

The dominant perspective of Peruvian society generally shared by policymakers within the state structures is one which is principally urban, Spanish speaking, based on 'Western' culture, and 'modern' aspirations. This view is both a cause as well as a symptom of a centralised approach to planning which ignores the cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic heterogeneity of Peruvian society, leaving large sectors of the population alienated from 'mainstream' culture within the education system:

*'The users of the Peruvian education system found themselves in a hidden conflict with an educational system which favoured an imaginary national society and which ignored individual needs and interests while excluding the elements of ownership and identity of those who did not fit in with the identified cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic norms.'*⁴

While educational reforms in the 1970s sought to recognise and respond to cultural diversity in Peru, the underlying aim was to seek effective ways of facilitating the integration of different groups into an overall national framework: *'The emphasis of educational reform was based on a vision of an ideal society which the different state reforms were working towards creating. Although modified, the same concepts of nation and citizenship determined the course of Peruvian educational policy.'*⁵

Limited participation in policy-making

As well as being geographically and culturally centralised, the process of education policy-making has also been politically centralised in terms of lack of participation of the different actors and stakeholders involved in the education system, including teachers, parents and children themselves. In common with most countries, education reform has traditionally been seen as the responsibility and domain of the state. In the past, seeking the agreement of teachers (those, after all, responsible for putting policies into practice at the classroom level) has not been seen as a priority by policymakers. The importance of teacher participation in the decision-making process to ensure that reforms are relevant, workable and effective has been even less recognised. This approach has led to a situation where teachers on the ground may be unaware of new policies, or may simply decide to ignore them, regardless of their usefulness.

Parents have also been ignored as potentially important actors in policymaking, both by government and the teaching profession. Their participation tends to be considered by teachers and educationalists as at best irrelevant and at worst disruptive, a view voiced by this teacher in the Andean department of Cusco:

'The best parent is the one who sends their child to school and then doesn't make a fuss, doesn't come in to school, or doesn't appear. On the other hand, a bad parent constantly comes in, follows his/her child around and constantly asks questions and shares opinions.'

In all areas of social policymaking, there is growing recognition of the value of wider civil participation, both in terms of giving legitimacy to new policies adopted and ensuring that those policies are appropriate. This approach to policymaking is still new and practical ways of facilitating the process are still being developed and tested, (as described in greater depth in the following section). As part of this process, the value of the participation of children and adolescents is only just beginning to be recognised. Children are still seen as passive beneficiaries of social policies, including education reform, rather than actors in their own right: *'I don't think it's a problem of a lack of channels for participation or forms of organisation, but a lack of confidence in the ability of children to take part themselves.'* Interview with member of Foro Educativo.

Since the introduction of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been a growing recognition in Peru, and throughout the region, of the importance of children's right to participation, reflected through initiatives such as the creation of a youth parliament. However, the nature and level of children's participation through such initiatives is often ambiguous, limited and symbolic, with the voice of children defined and channelled in adult terms and through adult structures. Within the education system, even where children are encouraged to voice their opinions, the extent of their participation is often limited by adults, as highlighted by children themselves: *'The adults listen to us, but when it comes to making decisions they don't support us'*

Existing attitudes to children and perceptions of their role and abilities are deeply ingrained and slow to change. The process of change is complex and challenging, even for those adults with the best intentions:

'Everybody; teachers, parents, people who work with children, do so with the best intentions. So what is it that makes all of us suppress the autonomy of children? I think we have to look more closely at what it means to be a responsible adult in terms of how we deal with children, because what happens in practice is that if someone gives liberty and independence to children, he/she is seen as irresponsible'. Interview with member of Foro Educativo

The next section outlines how Foro Educativo has embarked on the process of building up a broad-base for participation in education policy-making and changing attitudes towards children.

The 'culture of childhood'

The attitudes to children (and their participation) discussed above stem from what Foro Educativo refers to as the predominant 'culture of childhood' which needs to be explored and challenged if more relevant approaches to education are to be developed. In Peru, children have not only been absent from the process of educational policymaking, but also from the process of education itself.

As mentioned above, the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) has served as a catalyst for stimulating national debate on children and their role in development policy. However an enormous gulf between the provisions of the CRC and the reality of children's lives persists, and rights relating to children's participation continue to prove the most challenging for adults to accept.

'The spirit of the Convention appears formally in the policies developed, but it is not connected to the cultural changes which are required, or the elements which are

needed in order to create new attitudes and ways of conceptualising the role of children and the relationship between children and adults.' Ricardo Villanueva, Save the Children Programme Coordinator, Peru

Traditional attitudes to children in Peru are characterised as authoritarian and protective. Childhood is defined as an inferior state of human development - children are seen as incomplete adults in the making while adults are mature and superior. Because children's needs tend to be defined in terms of what they lack, their weakness and limitations, the rights focus tends to relate to provision and protection. A focus on these rights alone, while ignoring the right to participation and development, runs the risk of legitimising an authoritarian and hierarchical perception of the relationship between adults and children:

'Not only children, but also adolescents in different social sectors suffer repressive and negative conduct from the authorities, their parents and teachers in a bid to subjugate their will to the iron will of adults. They are seen as rebels, badly behaved, insolent, lacking respect and violent'⁶

'Too much protection and emphasis on provision can compromise the independence of the child, his/her development, discovery, the establishment of the norms needed to live with others, making decisions and taking part in putting them into practice.'⁷

This view leads to an assumption that children are, or should be, passive and dependent within the educational process, and that the problems faced by children can only be tackled by adults. This attitude is part and parcel of an outlook which sees the role of formal education as preparing children for a future in an adult world (as yet unknown, but predicted by adults) and ignores how children deal with challenges in their daily lives.

Within the formal education system, this outlook translates as the provision of different items or sets of knowledge deemed relevant to each age group, rather than building on the skills which children bring to the classroom and are developing to address real problems and social situations.

'knowledge is given out in doses based on an idea of what the children can or cannot do, without giving them challenges to resolve... The idea of taking into account the previous knowledge of children (not just in terms of information, but rather the body of theoretical and practical knowledge, values and attitudes which influence their way of thinking, feeling and acting) in order to make links between what they know and what they are learning is not yet widely practised.'⁸ Ramirez De Sanchez Moreno.

A view of children as passive victims of their circumstances leads to the predominant 'deterministic' view of childhood which sees the future development of children as determined entirely by the constraints presented by their environment such as poverty, isolation, etc.

'The opinion that environmental conditions alone determine a child's development opportunities has led some authors to conclude that the high risk conditions which 70% of Peruvian children live in, affect beyond remedy the possibility of a healthy development.'⁹

While it is important to recognise the challenges that children face, it is also important to recognise that these challenges provide opportunities for children to develop their own problem-solving skills. An approach that focuses on what children lack and responds by 'providing' the knowledge adults think they need can even become a self-fulfilling prophecy: children identified in terms of their 'problems' can become children with learning difficulties, poor self-esteem, insecure, conflictive etc.

Linked to these assumptions about the capacities of children are a range of gender-related assumptions; for example, that girls have less capacity for abstract reasoning than boys, or have more limited aspirations. These kind of assumptions make up the prevailing 'culture of childhood' and need to be identified, unpicked and challenged if that culture is to be shifted.

Given that the capacities of children and the realities of their lives are currently absent from the process of formal education itself, it is hardly surprising that policy-makers and adults generally find it difficult to recognise the potential of children as key actors in educational policymaking, and to find ways of facilitating their active and effective participation.

'When we talk about policies we are talking about decisions which involve or should involve the whole of society. One of the biggest obstacles in promoting change in the educational system is a culture of childhood and education shared by the media, families, teachers, pupils, academics, teacher trainers, international bodies and technical teams in the Ministry of Education. We need to involve every one of these sectors, in one way or another, in the process of building consensus.' Member of Foro Educativo

The Response

A shared vision of development

The point of departure for Foro Educativo was a vision of development which places

the *individual* at the heart of policy, as opposed to approaches which focus principally on economic growth. In terms of education, the focus of Foro Educativo's work from the outset has been on human (and therefore child) development in defining both educational objectives as well as processes.

This focus on human development argues that basic education provision should respond to a range of key human needs shared by all individuals throughout their lives. In order to structure this approach, the Foro Educativo team has adopted the analytical framework of Chilean economist Manfred Max Neef¹⁰, who identified the following basic human needs:

- survival
- protection
- affection
- understanding
- participation
- recreation
- creativity
- identity
- liberty

As explored below, Foro Educativo's focus, analysis and recommendations have evolved as a result of the input of a wide range of actors through the network. Nevertheless, the basic principles outlined above continue to form the foundations of its thinking, and the organisation's achievement has been to bring others on board and build a shared understanding (what Foro Educativo calls "building consensus") among those involved in education in the governmental and non governmental sectors as well as those working on the ground.

Building a national consensus on education

The first stage of Foro Educativo's work was to start a process of internal debate within Peruvian civil society, with the objective of building a consensus on the purpose of education based on the vision of human development in education outlined above. This was carried out in two phases:

- ***Phase 1, 1994-5:*** formulating a set of educational principles and approaches based on a diagnosis of the basic needs of Peruvian children and adolescents, with input from a wide range of actors involved in education.

- **Phase 2, 1995-7:** based on the educational needs identified in the first phase, production of a series of documents, exploring and proposing policy changes in early, primary and secondary level education in Peru.

Under Phase 1, more than 2,000 people in 18 of the 24 departments of Peru participated in a series of 'National Educational Debates' to discuss an initial 'proposal' formulated by Foro Educativo's technical. These people represented different sectors of civil society including teachers and other education professionals, as well as with Ministry of Education representatives, to ensuring that input reflected a wide debate around educational issues.

Through these consultations, participants took part in identifying key needs of the population in relation to education and fed in comments and suggestions from both national and local regional perspectives. The consultations aimed to explore not only the problems that children and adolescents face, but also the resources which they draw on to tackle these problems, as well as exploring adults' and children's attitudes to and expectations of education in responding to these challenges.

This process culminated in the production of a publication ***Bases para un Acuerdo Nacional por la Educación*** (Foundations for a National Consensus on Education) in 1997, which was then presented and debated in a national conference on 'Education for Human Development'. In addition, the final document was debated at smaller regional conferences organised by ***Mesas Regionales*** (local education networks) which have been set up or strengthened, as a result of the consultation process initiated by Foro Educativo. Through the participation of these networks in the main regions (Cusco, Iquitos, Piura) it has been possible to ensure the development of educational proposals sensitive to local regional needs.

The extensive process of consultation and national debate on educational issues has generated a climate of excitement and renewal within both governmental and non-governmental educational institutions. The proposals produced have been well received by the technical teams of the Ministry of Education who were involved in the consultation process and thus share a sense of ownership. The recently published Basic Curriculum for Primary Education now includes within its theoretical framework a focus on human development and attention to the basic needs of children:

'Education should be orientated towards human development, including within this concept, the integrated development of the abilities, skills, competencies and knowledge needed to face a changing world. As part of our commitment to the national population, early years and primary education should take account of the needs of children and contribute to satisfying them'¹¹

In practical terms, this means the development of educational provision which responds to the needs of children and adolescents in their daily lives and helps develop the skills needed to secure a better future for both the individual and the country. There is, for example, a growing consensus around the need to develop a series of educational approaches focusing on 'life skills' such as problem solving, risk assessment, initiative, and the tools needed for the 'modern world' such as English and information technology.

The consultation process sought to give equal weight to both academic (educational specialists, Ministry of Education etc) and non-academic (teachers, local education officials etc) input, and this distinctive approach proved successful in stimulating national debate. As a result of the consultation process, Foro Educativo has come to be regarded as a legitimate representative of a wide range of perspectives in the field of education.

Building capacity for wider participation of civil society

As the process which led to the production of the *Bases* document evolved, Foro Educativo and its members became increasingly aware of low levels of participation of key stakeholders. In response, the organisation has developed a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging broader, more effective participation.

Once Foro Educativo recognised that participation of teachers and local authorities in the first stages of their work had been limited, efforts were made to bring them in more closely to the second phase, through the local *Mesas Regionales* (local education networks). Foro Educativo established a wide ranging information network, and initiatives such as teachers' workshops designed to promote the active participation of those working on the ground in testing new policies. Direct input from parents and children, however, was still absent, and the need to find ways of including them in the process of national debate on education was identified as a priority.

• *Information network*

To improve information exchange across regions, Foro Educativo pioneered the establishment of a fax-based information and policy network. The network makes accessible information on education policy initiatives which does not normally reach local education professionals and schools, and in turn also provides a channel for grass-roots responses to be fed into the national debate.

Twenty institutions are involved in managing the network, working in the regional departments of Ayacucho, Cusco, Cajamarca, Ica, Iquitos, Lambayeque, Piura and Puno as well as the metropolitan department of Lima-Callao. Information is

disseminated and exchanged through **Contacto Foro**, a bi-monthly publication which presents and analyses up to date information on educational policies. It is targeted principally at teachers, who use the information to introduce changes at the classroom level, and education authorities at the regional level who also use it as a resource in decision-making and the introduction of educational innovations:

'I have tried to link the information I receive (through Contacto Foro) with the reality here in Cusco. For example, I have begun to use some indicators developed by Foro Educativo in supervising the work of early years teachers. We have developed a 'sheet' so that the young children can tell us in a spontaneous way their views about their kindergarten, their teacher, and other things that can give us an idea of what the children themselves want. We include the information gathered using this 'sheet' in sessions arranged by the Local Education Authority where teachers learn from one another using a range of worksheets and resource packs which help them to turn these ideals into practice.' Interview with Nohemí Estrada, Specialist in Early Years Education at the Local Education Authority in Cusco

Box 1: Selected themes covered under *Contacto Foro*

Contacto Foro No 8 is entitled 'Barefoot Youngsters with Empty Dreams', and tries to put forward the 'other face' of youth. Under the title of 'Youth and adolescence; nothing more than violence?' this issue covers university brigades who have spontaneously organised themselves to offer practical assistance to those left homeless through the 'El Niño' floods and storms throughout the country.

'It was challenging to face people's prejudices about young people, like, for example, when they say we don't care, or that we won't be able to do what we say we will - it was sad and disappointing to find so many doors closed because of lack of confidence in us, but we realised that we could achieve a lot when we worked together, and that we are able to get together.' (interview with member of university brigade for Contacto Foro)

Contacto Foro No 11, 'Vulnerable but not beaten', aims to challenge perceptions of children. Under the editorial title 'Education in difficult situations' the following questions were explored: 'Is it possible to educate in situations of risk or disadvantage? Is it possible for girls and boys who are undernourished, who work, who are victims of violence or who come from poor homes to get on in life?'

'We are 9 siblings, but not all with the same mother. In my house I live with my little sister. I have lots of animals: duck, cock, dog, iguana, white mouse. I breed

and sell iguanas at 5 soles each, 10 for a pair. I set the price. But I won't sell the mouse. It's called Willy and goes about on my shoulder. My family sell pigs and I help with the selling. I like the religion and pastrymaking classes. We sell them and they give us some of the earnings. I invest my earnings in buying animals. I'd like it if there was a secondary level at this school so I could study languages' (Johnny, working child.)

Far from implying that environmental conditions do not impact on children's development, this issue underlines the danger of assuming that, because of their circumstances, underprivileged children cannot benefit from education and get on in life. This issue of *Contacto Foro* highlights the capacity which a group of working children have for maintaining their humanity and dreams for the future. The publication concludes that however hard children try, if the education available to them assumes that they are not capable of moving on, they will effectively be condemned to repeat the cycle of poverty and its associated ills.

Contacto Foro is circulated to some 4,000 people - it is also circulated by each centre that receives it, so the full extent of coverage is higher and yet to be calculated. Information from different sources (statistical data, official information from the Ministry of Education, specialised information and interviews with teachers and pupils) is presented accessibly in each 4 page issue covering a specific theme. Themes covered to date include:

- Taking the pulse of PLANCAD (teacher training plan)
- The start of the school year
- How much does school cost and who pays?
- Survival and protection: the needs of children and adolescents
- An educational information network based on the perceptions of children
- And after school...what? Educational options
- Barefoot youngsters with empty dreams
- Competencies...the key word in the new curriculum
- Youth and adolescence: nothing more than violence?
- Vulnerable but not beaten. Education in difficult situations
- A living school which learns from children

• *Teachers' workshops*

Teachers' workshops have been an important tool in making links between policy and practice. Through these workshops, teachers learn about new policies and practical educational approaches which can help them identify the needs of the students in their classes, and put forward their own ideas for workable responses to those needs.

These are not workshops on teaching methodologies or concrete innovations to be tried out in the classroom, but an opportunity for teachers to rethink the purpose of the education they are giving their students. Teachers are encouraged to analyse the policies developed by the Ministry of Education, as well as their own views of the purpose of education, their role as teachers and that of their students, their practical approach to teaching, and different ways of interpreting and implementing new policies.

Giving children a voice

As discussed earlier in this case study, one of the greatest challenges for Foro Educativo and its members has been to find effective ways of promoting the participation of children in the monitoring, analysis and development of effective education policy. Inextricably linked to this process has been the process of challenging adult perceptions of children and the prevailing 'culture of childhood', discussed below.

Children have a dual role in the process of developing educational policy: they represent a key point of reference for analysing the impact of the education system, but are also actors in their own right with opinions of the education system and their requirements from that system. Foro Educativo has developed the following strategies to facilitate children's involvement in these two processes:

- ***A set of child focused indicators***

The term 'child focused' is used to describe approaches which take as a starting point what children experience. Foro Educativo's child focused indicators have been designed to evaluate educational quality based on an analysis of children's needs. Based on the basic needs identified at the start of Foro Educativo's consultative process (survival, protection, affection, understanding, participation, recreation, creativity, identity and liberty - see Section II, part 1.1), a set of indicators were developed to test how the education provided addresses children's basic needs. Seven indicators were identified for each basic need, including the following examples:

- students who work
- schools that offer occupational skills workshops
- students who drop out of school due to pregnancy
- children who are insured against accidents happening within school
- teachers trained in sex education
- teachers who call their pupils by their first name
- teachers using active teaching methods in their classes

- student counselling offered by the school
- number of pupils who belong to a youth organisation
- schools which offer extra-curricular activities
- number of recreational facilities/resources per student
- schools which use the mother tongue as the principle teaching language
- schools which use self-assessment as an instrument of evaluation
- schools which develop activities based on student initiatives

The indicators evaluate factors related to what a school can offer (e.g. number of schools that offer occupational skills training workshops) as well as factors which relate to educational demand and which, while affecting educational opportunities, are not necessarily linked to the school system (e.g. number of students who drop out of school due to pregnancy). In this way, factors previously seen as abstract or secondary, such as the relationship between teachers and students and student participation are included in an approach to evaluating educational quality for the first time in Peru.

'It is not enough to analyse the possibilities available to groups or individuals in addressing their needs, but it is also important to examine how the context limits or encourages, the development of those possibilities by the groups or individuals.' Max Neef, Manfred¹²

The focus on children's needs as a starting point for evaluation represents a new departure from more orthodox approaches used by policymakers and investors (i.e. local and national government as well as international bodies such as the World Bank) which have focused on indicators such as repetition and drop-out rates, or factors related to economic investment in education such as infrastructure, materials, teacher training etc. within a framework of inputs and outputs.

The new set of child focused indicators are currently still being tested and Foro Educativo is exploring ways of incorporating them into work with schools through the network. In the long term, it is hoped that they will be taken up by the Ministry of Education (some senior MoE officers have already been involved at the development stage) and other key policymaking and funding bodies such as the World Bank. The use of child focused indicators in evaluating and developing education policy are part and parcel of a new way of looking at childhood and the purpose of education, the process of their uptake by policy-makers is liable to be long and slow.

• ***A mechanism for children's participation: The 'Dream Game'***

The Dream Game is a board game which facilitates the active participation of children in the policy debate, gathering their opinions and perceptions of education. The dissemination of this information provides policymakers, education officials and

teachers with a basis to incorporate children's perspectives into new educational approaches. The game was developed and piloted by Foro Educativo (initially with 7 to 11 year olds) and has since been used with children and adolescents at both state and private schools in Lima and other urban and marginal urban areas of the country (Iquitos in the Amazon region, Piura on the northern coastal strip, Arequipa in the arid region in the south).

Through an activity which is designed to be enjoyable and non-threatening, the children and adolescents express their dreams, interests and perceptions of their own experience of school, providing reference points for the analysis of educational policies. For example, a secondary school pupil playing the game in Iquitos had the following to say about the curriculum:

'A subject I would add in the first place is guidance for young people to help them with some of the problems they have, like gangs' While the same child suggested dropping the following subject: 'religion, because everyone has their own belief and school, through religion classes, can sometimes create divisions. I would let everyone choose for themselves.'

• *Youth consultations*

These give adolescents the opportunity to express their opinions on the education they receive, as well as their needs. The meetings promote open dialogue on the problems and challenges faced by young people now and in the future. Discussion is stimulated through a range of newspaper cuttings: the young people choose the subjects of most interest to themselves and discuss the issues raised, reflecting on how changes in educational policies can contribute to addressing these issues and challenges.

As an example, the government is currently proposing the creation of a further two years of secondary school (the 'bachillerato' - equivalent to sixth form in the UK). A fifth grade student had the following response: *'why don't they increase the number of classes instead of adding an extra year? Because those 2 years might be a waste of time for lots of young people. We already go to school for 11 years which is tiring enough, and now they're going to add two more! I think they should think very carefully before they impose the 'bachillerato'. It would be better to improve what we've already got, taking into consideration the views of the students and teachers.'*

Changing attitudes to childhood

As already discussed, for participation of children and adolescents to be truly effective a shift in the 'culture of childhood' is needed. Paradoxically, as the work of Foro Educativo highlights, the current 'culture of childhood' can be challenged by the very

process of child participation itself, both in terms of focusing on their educational needs as well as including them in the policymaking process.

The importance of child participation and of challenging perceptions of childhood in order to build a more effective and responsive educational system was not recognised by the members of Foro Educativo when the organisation was established. It only became increasingly clear as the consultative process developed. This area of work represents a new departure for Foro Educativo, and new approaches are being explored:

'Foro Educativo started out with a focus on developing proposals for educational policy reform, teaching practice, management etc. But placing children at the centre of their work was not there at first. It comes out in the books on indicators and early years education. This is an important step, but... I don't yet see a permanent focus at the heart of Foro Educativo's work on this issue of the 'culture of childhood' or child participation and protagonism... it's not completely there yet.'

Member of Foro Educativo

Nevertheless, the development of Foro Educativo's work to date points towards a clearer focus on children, based on the initial focus on the development of the individual, the identification of basic needs, and the focus on the potential and capacities of children. This focus is evident in *Contacto Foro*, both in terms of the underlying purpose of the information network as well as through the themes covered by the publication.

Partnership and the role of an INGO

As we have seen, Foro Educativo's approach is to link the grass-roots and policymakers by building local partnerships between government, local education authorities, academics, NGOs, teachers and students. Their relationship with international organisations is an extension of this approach and has the potential for influencing policy beyond the national sphere. Foro Educativo has working links with the World Bank and with UNESCO, as well as other INGOs who have followed and supported its work. This section looks more closely at the relationship between Foro Educativo and Save the Children.

Foro Educativo is a distinctively Peruvian initiative which came about at a critical historical moment as a result of local conditions. Nevertheless, from its inception in 1992, Save the Children has had an important role in shaping the organisation and its work. Save the Children's initial decision to fund the first seminar, and subsequently fund the establishment of Foro Educativo as an NGO, was based on the existing dialogue with key individuals and organisations who shared similar concerns about

education and perspectives on development. It is important to recognise that Save the Children staff in Peru are local actors in their own right and are well linked in to local networks and debates. This means that, through local staff, the attention of Save the Children as an INGO (working nationally, regionally and internationally) can be drawn to innovative and effective initiatives as they emerge, so that priorities can be identified and appropriate responses developed. The history of Save the Children's relationship with Foro Educativo is a good example of this process.

Despite the convergence of outlook and priorities, Save the Children was initially concerned that Foro Educativo would become purely a think-tank, divorced from the reality of children's lives and education provision on the ground. However, through renewed involvement with Foro Educativo since 1996, Save the Children has actively contributed to the development of the NGO's ideas and strategies, leading to the piloting of child focused approaches to analysing education needs and influencing policymaking through specific projects such as the children's board game (The 'Dream Game' - see above):

"This was groundbreaking work for Foro Educativo and in many ways for our (Save the Children's) work in South America, because it was investing in the design of a methodology to access young people's opinions." Martin Kelsey, Save the Children Programme Director South America

In addition, through its partnerships with other local actors, Save the Children has also been able to give practical support to Foro Educativo as its work has developed. To balance the concern that, for logistical reasons, the focus of Foro Educativo's work to date has been largely concentrated in urban areas, Save the Children has facilitated links with another partner, ADAR (The Association for the Development of Rural Amazonia), to ensure that rural children are brought into the network.

The partnership between Save the Children and Foro Educativo represents a two-way process of discussion and mutual learning. As one of Save the Children's key partners in the region, Foro Educativo had an important role in helping Save the Children to define a new regional strategy which focuses on education as one of the key themes. The experience with Foro Educativo has shown formal education to be an area where Save the Children can work effectively with local partners to develop child focused indicators and methods for facilitating child participation in monitoring education quality and developing policy changes. It has also helped Save the Children to focus on these approaches and apply them to other areas of work beyond education.

By involving Foro Educativo closely in the regional strategy and programme, Save the Children also aims to ensure that the approach being developed in Peru achieves a

wider impact in the region. As part of the regional strategy, Save the Children will embark next year on similar work with partners in Colombia and Brazil:

'What is important about the Foro Educativo project is that although it is obviously set in the Peruvian context, addressing very specific education issues in Peru, the methodology, how you work with small children in the classroom, thinking about information linkages, etc, is obviously a methodology which can be applicable in other countries... there is interest in both Colombia and Brazil to take that model and make changes as appropriate.' Martin Kelsey, Save the Children Programme Director South America

Challenges for the Future

Since its creation in 1993, Foro Educativo has been successful in stimulating debate around education and facilitating broad participation in that debate. The demand for participation has in fact proved greater than anyone had anticipated; as word has spread, schools in different parts of the country have requested to be linked to the information network, and offered themselves as 'nodes' (a regional centre for disseminating Contacto Foro, receiving feedback and channelling it back to Foro Educativo). Members of Foro Educativo consistently report a sense of excitement and new consensus on the purpose of education and a shared commitment to consultation at all levels of the education system.

The consultative style of Foro Educativo's work, based on communication, feedback and cross-referencing, facilitates the identification of gaps and limitations. It was through this approach that the importance of bringing children more actively into the policymaking process was identified early on. Other limitations to participation and representation have also come to light, raising new challenges for future work including the following examples:

- How can parents become more involved in the national education debate through the information network? One obvious way to approach this is through Parent Teacher Associations, but this would only involve parents who already take an active role in their children's education. Innovative ways of accessing parents who are more removed from the education system - those who either do not support their children's school attendance or decide remove their children from school - are being explored.
- How can children who are not in school (non-enrolees or dropouts) be involved in the process of consultation? Seeking the opinions of children

in school may help explain why children lose interest and decide to drop out, but more effort needs to be directed towards accessing the educational attitudes and needs of children outside the system.

- How can the rural perspective be brought more closely into the process? To date, rural schools and children have been under-represented, although links have recently been established with organisations in the Amazon region. The challenge to open up the network more extensively to rural areas is important given that these are the areas where problems of non-enrolment, absenteeism and drop out are highest. Logistical problems of lack of resources and effective communication systems in rural schools are a limiting factor: Contacto Foro may reach rural towns by fax, but not isolated communities and schools. A first step towards addressing this issue is to find out more about how Contacto Foro is already being distributed informally beyond the established fax network.
- How can cultural differences, particularly where minority languages are involved, be taken into account by the network to ensure that it is more accessible to and reflects the concerns of children from diverse cultural groups? Minority languages and bilingual education are crucial issues within national education policy to which Foro Educativo has not yet given priority. The absence of new debate on these issues within the network may reflect the problem of reaching and engaging isolated and rural areas, both because of technical and resource limitations and the fact that the language of the network is Spanish.

A crucial challenge facing Foro Educativo, in common with all NGOs involved in the process of influencing policy, is how to track effectively the impact of its work on policymaking and, in the long term, on the educational opportunities available to children. As we discussed in the first section, since 1995 there has been a shift in education policy away from infrastructure development to more of a focus on the quality and effectiveness of education provided in schools. This shift has coincided with the 'proposals' published by Foro Educativo based on input through regional consultations and the information network. While it is known that key Ministry of Education officials are involved in the consultative processes and receive material produced by Foro Educativo, it is difficult - perhaps impossible - to measure the extent to which Foro Educativo's input impacts on the policy decisions made by the Ministry of Education. In an attempt to track the impact of their work, Foro Educativo systematically logs its activities and involvement on different education issues, setting them against policy decisions made by the Ministry of Education, but recognises that many other external factors also influence how decisions are taken.

A further problem in gauging impact is that while lip service is often paid to the proposals developed by Foro Educativo, this may not translate into changes in practice. For example, child focused indicators may generate a lot of interest, but are not necessarily adopted and used effectively. The very nature of Foro Educativo's work requires a long-term view: the fundamental goal of changing attitudes both to children and to education is part of a process which is necessarily long, slow, diffuse and difficult to track.

To date, Foro Educativo has concentrated its work within Peru and this provides a sound basis for it to build alliances with other education networks and organisations working towards similar objectives in the wider Latin American region. Building links, together with finding ways of engaging more proactively with influential multilateral agencies such as the World Bank represent new strategic aims for the organisation to take forward in the coming years.

The financial sustainability of Foro Educativo is also a major challenge. During its establishment, the organisation has been relatively dependent on Save the Childrenⁱⁱ. However the fact that it now has a growing profile and has demonstrated capacity to generate materials and reach a wide-ranging public stand it in good stead to diversify its funding base both through existing and future links with other agencies.

ⁱⁱ Foro Educativo raises funds through annual fees from associated members

Finally there are macroeconomic factors which could impact on the work of Foro Educativo (and all those involved in education reform) in the future. As economic recession looms, with Brazil already in financial crisis and instability set to spread across the region, there are fears that education may once again slip down the public spending priority list.

What has been learnt?

The Peru case study shows how a local NGO can play a key role in building connections between civil society and the government sector to open up the debate on education and stimulate a process through which education policy and practice can become more responsive to children's real needs. The study describes an approach which offers useful lessons on how to build capacity for broad-based participation on education issues and challenge existing attitudes towards children.

Making links between civil society and government

Operating within the structure of civil society at a time of social division and distrust, a

local NGO can play a crucial role in rebuilding links between different individuals and organisations in the state and non-state sectors. In this case, the fact Foro Educativo was established by people with a long-term commitment to education gave it the legitimacy to engage with both users and providers of education systems and to pioneer a process of dialogue between the groups. Foro Educativo's catalytic role in this process demonstrates three important components:

- providing a starting point for debate (here a developmental vision of education)
- organising opportunities for dialogue and ensuring broad-based participation from both the academic and non-academic sectors (regional consultations, the network)
- managing the process of consultation and feedback and synthesising the outcomes into working outputs (education policy proposals)

Building capacity for broad-based participation

The process described above seized an opportunity, at a particular moment in the Peruvian political and social context, to develop wider social participation in policy-making. It encouraged stakeholders to see that they had a valid contribution to make to the education debate and similarly helped government officials to recognise the value of listening to teachers and users. Foro Educativo's experience demonstrates:

- the power of a common voice among stakeholders in influencing policy-makers
- the importance of a sense of shared ownership between civil society and government in relation to proposals for policy change
- the legitimisation of policies through broad-based participation in their development, ensuring that they are more responsive to children's needs and reflect regional and cultural differences
- the importance of participation of teachers and users in translating policies into practice in the classroom.

In terms of measuring the impact of its influencing work, Foro Educativo has faced a common problem: how far can policy change be attributed to the network's activities, and how far have other external factors influenced policymaking? Although there has

been a shift in education policy-making in the direction of Foro Educativo's proposals, the organisation is realistic about the dangers of over-emphasising its role in this process.

As we have seen, Foro Educativo's experience also highlights some of the challenges and limitations of participation, alongside the opportunities it offers to review and adapt strategies. Some of these limitations are being addressed by, for example, shifting emphasis towards more parent and pupil participation. But Foro Educativo has yet to tackle some more complex issues, including how to engage out-of-school children and their parents in the process, and how to ensure the participation of groups which are most culturally marginalised or geographically isolated.

Promoting the value of children's participation and child-focused indicators

Achieving meaningful children's participation is notoriously difficult. The Foro Educativo experience demonstrates some common barriers to effective participation, namely social attitudes to children. The members of Foro Educativo are aware of their own limitations within the traditional mindset of Peruvian society which tends to perceive children as passive recipients of adult knowledge. It was largely the process of participation itself that provided the impetus to challenge assumptions about children and promote their active involvement in the education debate.

Foro Educativo is taking a lead nationally in developing ways of ensuring effective participation of children in the consultation process, and indicators of education quality which focus on the real lives and development needs of children. The growing willingness of government officials, teachers and parents to listen and respond to children's perspectives shows that an approach such as this which is interactive rather than didactic can offer real scope for changing ingrained social attitudes at all levels.

Promoting communication between providers: the role of a network

The creation of a regional network in schools has been instrumental in improving practice at the classroom level and providing a body of practical experience to feed into the policy-making process. The network was pioneered through fax communication which has proved highly effective in facilitating rapid exchange of information, quickly building up momentum. It makes accessible up-to-date information on educational policies and examples of good practice and is considered a useful resource among both teachers and local education authorities. Its value is corroborated by growing requests from new schools to join the network and to channel information to and from other schools in their area. The scope of a fax based network remains restricted due to the isolation of certain regions and communities where fax may be inaccessible or unreliable, and ways of making the network more inclusive are being explored.

The role of an international NGO

In Peru, as we have seen, Save the Children was in the right place at the right time to support the development of a pioneering process of broad participation in the national education debate. This support has been concentrated in four main areas:

- ***Financial support:*** towards the establishment of Foro Educativo and its evolving work programme
- ***Capacity building support:*** sharing Save the Children's wider experience of developing child-focused analysis and methodologies
- ***Building links:*** at national and regional level with other educational NGOs and networks in order to share and inform the work of Foro Educativo
- ***Mutual learning:*** involving Foro Educativo in the development of Save the Children's regional strategic plan and drawing on the organisation's practical experience in order to inform Save the Children's work globally

Plans to make a more effective contribution to Foro Educativo's development and promote wider learning are currently being shaped as part of a regional strategy. In addition to broadening Foro Educativo's exposure to other organisations and networks working on education in the region, Save the Children hopes to use the experience of Foro Educativo to influence initiatives more widely. This process has already begun with a workshop (hosted by Save the Children in Brazil, July 1999) on practical approaches to influencing education, where Foro Educativo were able to share lessons learnt with organisations from Latin America and other regions.

Editors' Conclusions

- In a highly centralised education system, where national policy reflects the interests of powerful urban, Spanish-speaking groups, the NGO Foro Educativo has developed practical approaches to facilitate broader participation, such as its fax-based national information and learning network.
- Foro Educativo's initial approach was academic and centralised, seeking to develop its own "national consensus" on quality education. Although its vision of education was clearly child-centred, it initially ignored the fact that adults did not accept children as actors in their own right, and it was not attuned to the needs of groups not represented in Foro Educativo.
- However, through its consultative style and receptiveness to external ideas (including those from Save the Children), Foro Educativo was able to facilitate new debates and act on issues that came out of them. These included rural perspectives, involving parents and children excluded from the education system, the importance of minority languages, and the challenge to traditional views of childhood.
- The culture of assuming that children are passive recipients of education has been challenged both through facilitating debates and demonstrating children's own independent successes, for example the university brigades which gave practical support to people made homeless by the El Niño storms.
- Save the Children has explicitly sought to ensure that the learning process is two-way. Foro Educativo was involved in developing Save the Children's strategy and programme for the wider Latin America region.

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Liberia	Boys in the Virginia care centre playing with local children (photo, Jenny Matthews)
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Felicity Hill	<i>Cost sharing in basic education (examples from Africa and South Asia)</i>
Pholoho Khatleli, Lilian Mariga, Lineo Phachaka and Sue Stubbs, <i>Schools for all: National</i>	
	<i>planning in Lesotho</i> , in O'Toole & McConkey (eds) <i>Innovations in Developing Countries for People with Disabilities</i> , Lisieux Hall, Lancashire, 1995
Rachel Lambert	<i>Education for children of pastoralists</i>
Marion Molteno	<i>Education at the margins</i> , keynote paper prepared for a conference of that name, Cambridge, April 1998
Lynette Mudekanye, Karen Eyres, Chris McIvor, Sarah Hands, <i>Basic education for children on the</i>	
	<i>commercial farms in Zimbabwe</i>
Helen Penn	<i>The education of children in ex-communist countries</i> , Social Science Research Institute, Univ of London, 1999 (based on experience with Save the Children)
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