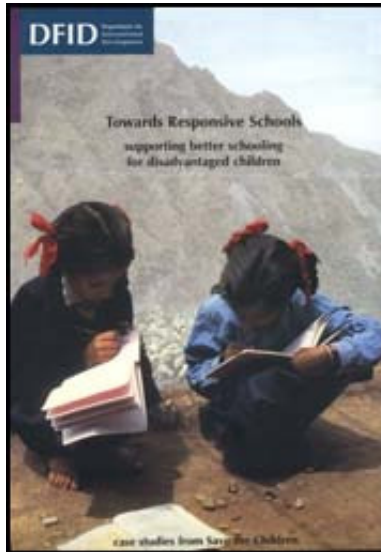


Towards Responsive Schools Supporting Better Schooling for Disadvantaged Children - Education Research Paper No. 38, 2000, 270 p.



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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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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

Contexts of disadvantage

What can an international agency do?

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.

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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 bureaucratized 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)



analysis/writing: Pawan Gupta, Anuradha Joshi
editor: Bridget Crumpton
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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, 'Vippassana' 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.

'Vippassana 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 'Vippassana'. 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 led 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 by-passed 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 meetings 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: - teacher salaries - training - materials e.g. books	Generates income though: - 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	- increasingly channels fund to	- manages the school bank account

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the - school bank account - provide training & support to - VEC on financial management - monitors school bank account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - issues payment for salaries & materials
School Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides materials e.g. cement & steel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides labour & land
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provides training & support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nominates new teachers & monitors attendance

Teachers salaries	- 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

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

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'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 can 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 purpose ⁸.

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 Pedagogic 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 ***Pedagogíe 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 Pedagogic 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 ***Pedagogie Convergente*** goes. But the decision to work with the ***Pedagogie 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 Pedagogie 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 ***Pedagogía 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 Pedagogía 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 ***Pedagogía 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 ***Pedagogie 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 Mclvor, C (ed)1999. The earth in ourhands: 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. Predictably, 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](#)
[A chance to start again - Rehabilitating child soldiers - A case study from Liberia](#)
[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 Lebanese Civil War

- 91

- 1982** War. Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Massacres in Palestinian refugee camps
- 1986** The camp wars between Lebanese and Palestinian - 7 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
- Israeli attacks in South Lebanon. Displacement form
- 1996**

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, Sibilin 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 staffs 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.

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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 outstripped 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 targetting 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 inaccessible 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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