

THE GAMBIA

Community Mobilisation in School Mapping
Community Participation in the Management

1. BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW OF THE GAMBIA

The Gambia is a small country on the West Coast of Africa. It gained her independence from Britain in 1965. According to the 1993 Population and Housing census, it has a population of 1,028,341, a population growth rate of 4.2% per annum and a population density of 97 persons per square kilometres. This makes it one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. It has a parliamentary system of democracy with a per capita GDP of 420 Dollars.

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE GAMBIA

The school going age in the Gambia is officially seven years. The education system, which is largely based on the British system, consists of the following:

- Six years of primary schooling: grades 1 – 6
- Three years of Junior Secondary schooling: grades 7 – 9
- Three years of Senior Secondary schooling: grades 10 – 12
- Four years of University education

At the end of grades 6 and 9, there are selection examinations to proceed to the next level. At the end of grade 9 people have the option to go into the numerous skills centres which provide pre-vocational training for its students. At the end of grade 12 also, depending on their performance in the West African senior Secondary Certificate Exam (WASSCE), students have the option to go into the Technical Training Institute, which provide vocational and technical education; to into Gambia college which provide pre-service training for teachers, nurses, public health officers and agricultural supervisors; or they can go on to university or join the world of work.

University education in the past was only available outside the Gambia. It is however now available in the Gambia through the University Extension Programme (UEP)

with St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. But in October this year the University of the Gambia proper is expected to start.

ENROLMENT RATES

In 1996/97, the primary Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was 70% for both sexes , 61% for females and 79% for males. For the Junior Secondary level (grades 7 – 9), the GER for the same year was 31% for both sexes, 25% for females and 36% for males. The above statistics are national averages and do not show the glaring disparities between rural and urban areas. For example in 1997/98, the GER for Region One which is largely urban was about 68% for both sexes, 63% for females and 72% for males. For region six, which mostly rural, the GER for the same year were 43% for both sexes, 35% for females and 51% for males.

LITERACY RATES

Accurate and reliable measurements of literacy rates in the Gambia are difficult to come by in the Gambia. This is because of the conceptual problem of having a unanimously acceptable definition of literacy. For example if literacy is taken to mean the ability to read and write in any language using any script, the literacy rate will be different from when literacy is defined as the ability to read and write English using Roman script.

That notwithstanding, the literacy rate reported by the 1993 Population and Housing Census was that for people of age ten years and above, the literacy rates were 40% for both sexes, 26% for females and 54% for males. In the urban areas the literacy rates were 52.7% for both sexes, 65% for males and 40% for females. In the rural areas, the rates were 32% for both sexes, 46.6% for males and 18% for females.

CHALLENGES TO THE GAMBIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE EIGHTIES

In the 1980s the education system of the Gambia was plagued by a number of problems, key among which were:

- Limited access to education, particularly Junior and Senior secondary education because of limited space at this level, the long distance that students had to walk to the nearest school and inappropriate siting of schools in some cases.
- High cost of education to parents and students.
- Poor overall quality of education due to low teacher quality; high proportion of unqualified and untrained teachers in the system and the general scarcity of educational materials especially textbooks.

The combined and cumulative effect of these is low enrolment rates overall, poor quality education that is largely not relevant to the needs of the Gambian society and the students themselves.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE 1990s

As response to the above challenges and in order to respond to an ever increasing public demand for access to quality and relevant education from an ever increasing population, the government introduced a series of innovations at the beginning of the 1990s. The innovations were:

- Introduction of double-shift teaching in urban and semi-urban centres.
- Involvement of communities in school mapping exercises of the department of state for education.
- Giving greater role for communities in school management through the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs).
- Introduction of a Textbook Revolving Fund and a Textbook Rental Scheme.
- Introduction of the RIFT programme at Gambia College to increase the number of qualified female teachers.
- Introduction of an In-service training programme for teachers.
- Intensification of the up-grading programme for long-serving unqualified teachers.

As a result of the above innovations, the education system was able to achieve the following breakthroughs:

ACCESS

- Rapid and sustained increase in enrolment and gross enrolment rates across the country, particularly at the junior and senior secondary levels.
- Increase in transition rates from grade 6 to 7 and from grade 9 to 10.
- Reduced cost of education to parents and students, thereby making it more affordable.
- Better and more appropriately located schools and improved rapport between schools and the communities they serve.
- Reduced walking distance to the nearest primary school.
- Schools being demanded and even built by communities which have previously opposed Western education for their children.

QUALITY AND RELEVANCE

- Each student now has a set of textbooks for the four core subjects: English, Social and Environmental Studies, Maths and Science.
- Increase in the number of qualified teachers.
- Regular and continuous in-service training now available, though not all, but to a good number of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the preceding section, the education system of the Gambia in the 1980s was plagued by a number of problems relating to:

- Access to education.
- Quality of education.
- Relevance of education.

In response to these challenges, the government came up with a number of innovations which resulted in tangible breakthroughs.

This section of the report looks at each of the breakthroughs mentioned above and provides a detailed description of it, the rationale behind the innovation and the baseline situation before the introduction of the innovation which gave rise to the breakthrough. The breakthroughs are discussed under the following sub-headings:

- **Access**
- **Quality**

ACCESS

At the beginning of the policy period (1988 - 2003), the gross enrolment ratio for the primary level was estimated at 60%¹. This was projected to increase to 65% by 1996 and to 75% by 2003. However, due to government's commitment to increase access to education, the actual gross enrolment ratio in 1996 was 70%. This was possible as a result of the following strategies.

- 1) Community Mobilisation in School Mapping
- 2) Community Participation in the Management of Schools
- 3) Introduction of Double Shift teaching in the Urban and Sub-Urban Areas

¹ This was later revised to 58% when the 1993 census figures were available.

Community Mobilisation in School Mapping

In the past, school mapping used the Rational Educational Planning model in which the centre rationalises the distribution and location of schools. This has resulted in some schools having very low enrolments. To address this issue, communities' demand for schooling was put at the centre of the school mapping process which led to a dramatic increase in enrolments in areas where previously there were low enrolments. The decision to locate a school site is jointly taken by the communities for which the schools are meant to serve, Regional Education Offices and the Central Planning Division. It is an on-going process, which covers all the rural communities in the country and at all level of the education system.

Community Participation in the Management

Community participation in school management in The Gambia has been very minimal in the past. This has led to the alienation of influential community members in the affairs of the schools which resulted in low enrolments. With the introduction of a policy to increase the participation of communities in the running of schools, the gap that hitherto existed between communities and schools has now been bridged giving the communities a greater role to play in the schools. This has led to a marked increase in enrolment in many rural schools. A key component of this strategy is the establishment of strong Parent Teacher Associations with parents holding key positions such as treasurer and president of such associations. Schools at all levels of the education system are required to (as a matter of policy) establish a Parent Teacher Association.

Introduction of Double Shift teaching In Urban Schools

Limited human and classroom facilities have hindered the development of education in The Gambia before the inception of the 1988 - 2003 policy. Teachers were teaching one class a day and every classroom was being used by one group of students. This had affected enrolment growth, particularly in the urban area, where in addition to the high cost of constructing new classrooms, the availability of land constitutes another obstacle. Double shift teaching was introduced in 1990 in selected school as a pilot. In

these schools, some teachers were identified to teach two different cohorts of students (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). In addition, a single classroom was used to serve 90 students instead 45 (i.e. 45 in the morning and 45 in the afternoon). The introduction of double shift has contributed in the significant increase in enrolment in these schools. After the success of the pilot phase it was introduced in all urban schools nation wide.

In spite of the achievements made in the increase in enrolment through the introduction of double shift teaching, increased access to schooling was constrained in some cases by lack of Junior secondary schools and high cost of schooling in general.

Quality

Before the beginning of the 1988 – 2003 policy period, the quality of Education in the Gambia – measured largely by educational inputs – was found to be wanting. Basic learning inputs such as Textbooks were not available and teaching/learning was basically ‘chalk and talk’ method. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of teachers at the primary level were unqualified and untrained.

In order to address this situation, a textbook scheme was introduced in 1992. This scheme allows two pupils without textbooks to share one. In addition to the training of 1,200 teachers by the Gambia College (the only Teacher training College in the country) to increase the number of trained teachers another INSET programme, a Regional Strategy for the Training and Education of Teachers (RESETT), was introduced with the help of the then British Overseas Development Administration (ODA).

Textbook Scheme.

The scheme consists of a revolving fund which is used to buy the initial stock of books and rental scheme which enables students to have a set of core textbooks at an affordable rental fee which is paid annually.

The objectives of the scheme were, among other things,

- To increase the number of core subject textbooks used in primary and junior secondary schools
- To make textbooks more affordable for students and parents
- To ensure a sustainable supply of funds for replacing and updating books.

Major characteristics of the scheme include the payment of rental fees by students and parents. At the level of the school, the head teacher or a Textbook Administrator is responsible for the collection of rental fees.

All Primary and Junior Secondary schools through out the country, were included in the scheme.

In spite of the success achieved by providing textbooks to most children, the scheme experienced some attendant problems which were mainly administrative/management. The scheme does not have a readily identifiable management structure to plan and ensure the smooth running of the scheme. The administration and management are not decentralised enough.

RESETT

The RESETT project was introduced in the Gambia in 1992. Its goal was

‘to assist the Government of the Gambia develop a more productive school system and an effective teaching force able to support the widening access ... and the increasing quality required by the 1988 – 2003 Education Policy’ (Project Memorandum)

The project focuses mainly on the enhancement of the teaching abilities of a selected number of classroom teachers in Science, Maths, Social and Environmental Studies and, English. These teachers, who are exclusively from primary schools, are used as resource teachers for their schools or clustered schools in some cases.

The introduction of the RESETT project has contributed immensely in the quality of teaching at the primary level.

3.0 Evidence of Breakthrough

3.1 Access

In the early eighties, education in the Gambia was characterised by low enrolments, particularly in the rural area. During this period, only 60% of the children of school going age were in school, leaving the majority of children out of school (MEYSC 1988: 14). For those wanting to send their children to school too, both the distance to the nearest school and high educational costs, including the cost of learning materials, were major factors inhibiting the participation of their children, especially girls (The World Bank 1995 : xx).

The Gambia Education Policy 1988 – 2003 ushered in a period of new policy guidelines aimed at vigorously pursuing an expanded vision to education, by increasing access to educational services, particularly in areas where enrolments were lowest. This culminated in

- ◆ the introduction of double-shift teaching in schools where the demand for places was high.
- ◆ a shift in the mode of school mapping and site location from the Rational Educational Planning model in which only the Ministry's rationality counts to one in which community mobilisation in school mapping and site location is key elements.
- ◆ Greater community participation of communities in the management of schools.

3.1.1 Double shift

Double shift teaching was introduced in selected Gambian schools in 1990. The years preceding its introduction saw marginal increases in the enrolments. However, after its introduction, a rapid expansion in enrolment (averaging 8% per annum) was realised. In 1997/98, the total enrolment in the primary schools reached 141,569 out of which 32% (45,302 pupils) were in double shift classes. This indicates that without Double shift, this number of children would have been out of school unless additional classrooms were built and the required number of teachers provided.

The case study covers three big schools (Bakau New Town, Sere Kunda and Brikama) in the urban area. Bakau New Town has an enrolment of 1,537 while Sere Kunda and Brikama have enrolments of 3,607 and 2,226 respectively. In all these schools, about

50% of the students is accounted for by the number of children attending double shift classes.

Despite the significant contribution double shift has made towards increasing access to education, concerns regarding its effectiveness have been raised by both teachers and parents with regard to teaching and learning. While the majority of parents and teachers involved in the case study agree, in principle, on the necessity of double shift in increasing access, it is the view of most of these parents and teachers that both students and teachers find it difficult to cope under its present form. Teachers opined that double shift teaching requires a lot of sacrifice and that it is hectic. Others consider the students coming permanently in the afternoon as the group losing out given the fact that by the end of the morning session, the teachers would have been already exhausted.

In schools where students alternate between morning and afternoon shifts for a specific period, both parents and teachers agree with the fact that students are being treated equally and therefore no difference due to double shift. However, in one of the schools (Bakau New Town), the point was emphatically made by parents that children's enthusiasm towards going to school fell very low when it was their turn to attend school in the afternoon. In the other two (Sere Kunda and Brikama) however, the teachers declared that they had no problems with the double shift.

3.1.2 Community participation in school mapping and school management

In the past, school mapping and site location were, to a very large extent, done by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry would, using its own rationality, determine the distribution and location of schools with little or no involvement of the communities. This resulted in cases where schools were located in areas where communities perceive the school as having no value to them or even see it as a threat to the norms and values of these communities. In cases where a group of communities agree to have a school, the actual location of the school site – done by the Ministry without the necessary consultation and agreement with the community – has resulted in low enrolment.

In the case study, three communities (Jimbala, Sabi and Gambisara Lamoi) with high involvement in both school management and school mapping were deliberately sampled, to be compared with two other communities (Toniataba/Sey Kunda and Barajally/Sukuta) in which the location of the school was contentious. Comparing the trend in enrolment of these two sets of schools, it is clear that where the community has a great deal of involvement in the setting up of the school, the trend in enrolment growth is higher than the case where the community has very little or no involvement. For example Enrolment in the three communities with high community involvement in both school mapping and school management, the proportion of school age children attending school is over 70%. In fact, this high proportion was achieved immediately after the opening of the school. On the contrary, the case study has shown that the proportion of school age children attending school in the other two communities is much lower (about 40%).

All schools are required by law to form Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). The role of the PTA include, among other things, the management of the financial resources of the school, taking key decisions about development projects. The positions of Chairman and treasurer, who are signatories to the school account, must be occupied by parents. The head teacher serves as secretary to the association.

Community involvement in school management, which was very minimal in the past, leaving influential community members outside the management of schools, has affected the enrolment of some schools. However, the enrolment in schools that have shared their management responsibility with members of the community, has shown remarkable increases.

3.2 Quality

Before the beginning of the 1988 – 2003 policy period, the quality of education in the Gambia – measured largely by educational inputs – was found to be wanting. Basic learning materials such as textbooks were not available and a good number of teachers (about 61% in 1986/87) were untrained (MEYSC 1988 : 19).

3.2.1 Textbooks

The absence of textbooks in most schools before the introduction of the Textbook Rental Scheme meant that children attending school had to provide their own set of textbooks, the cost of which was found to be high by the majority of Gambian parents, especially rural parents. Most teachers therefore resorted to the ‘chalk and talk’ method (MEYSC 199x). As students proceed to the secondary school, this cost became higher in addition to the school fees that children are to pay at this level. Given the fact that the average family size of the two poorest quintiles in the Gambia is 11.3, these families would have to spend 2.4% as a percentage of per capita income if they were to send all their children to primary school (DOSE 1998: 25).

To reduce the cost burden on parents, the Textbook rental scheme was introduced to make the cost more affordable to parents and students. This meant that the cost

3.2.2 Quality of teachers

The quality of teaching was also considered to be poor given that over 60% of the teachers in the Primary schools were untrained in 1986/87 academic year.

The unprecedented expansion in enrolment that characterised the Gambian education system in the 1990s is quite evident.

4.0 Explaining the Success

4.1 Strategies responsible for the success

The main strategies responsible for the success in increasing access are derived from greater involvement of communities in school mapping and location of school sites. In addition, teachers’ recognition of the economic realities of the country appreciate the fact that without double shift, a good number of children would never have the chance of attending school. With this recognition, they are determined to be engaged in the double shift in spite of the problems associated with it.

4.2 Processes and Procedures

Schools doing double shift are identified by either the Planning Directorate or following a request from the head teacher. A set of guidelines for schools eligible to run double shift is available to all heads. These guidelines have been widely discussed at sensitisation workshops aimed at addressing the issues of what the education system can and cannot do based on the resources available. Depending on whether or not a school meets the provisions of these guidelines, the head will file in a request which will be assessed against the agreed guidelines. In most cases, these requests are honoured.

Teachers involved in the double shift are paid an additional allowance of 50% of their monthly salary at the end of every month.

4.2.2 The school mapping exercise that was hitherto conducted exclusively by the Planning Unit of the Department of State for Education, is now a joint venture between the Regional Education Offices (REOs), the Communities and the Planning Unit. Through the usual community sensitisation network of the regional Principal Education Officers (PEOs), communities initiate the request for a school which is forwarded to the REOs. This request is then forwarded to the Planning Directorate which then organises a tripartite meeting including the Regional Education Office and the community in question. The purpose of the meeting is to agree on the site (usually selected by the community) and to negotiate with them the contribution they are expected to make.

4.2.x Students in Grade 1 to 4 paid about US\$2 and those in Grade 5 & 6 paid US\$3.

4.2.x RESETT training

4.3 *Factors responsible for the success*

- Sense of community ownership of schools,
- community contributing significantly in the form of labour and materials.
- A trend of community members abroad urging parents to send children to school
- Out of a genuine recognition of the economic realities of the country, teachers are resolved to be engaged in double shift teaching in spite the difficulties associated with double shift teaching.

4.4 Sources of set back

INSURMOUNTABLE CHALLENGES

In spite of the tremendous successes registered by the innovations, there still remains major challenges which may threaten the future sustainability of the innovations. Among these are:

- The high population growth rate experienced by the country, part of which has been due to the in-migration from countries in the sub-region.
- The gloomy macro-economic climate being experienced by the Gambia, like so many third world countries and the general level of poverty coupled with characteristically large family sizes means even the meagre rental fee might not be affordable to some parents. This may put political pressure on the government to reduce the rental fee to levels that may not be able to sustain the revolving fund or may scrap the rental fee altogether. At the end of the day political prudence may prevail over economic wisdom.
- Distributing the textbooks in the right quantities and at the right time to all the schools is a logistics nightmare that the scheme has still not been able to solve.
- Poor management, aggravated by frequent personnel change for the textbook scheme.
- The ability of the system to respond to an ever increasing public demand for education.
- Now that the project has come to an end, the sustainability and continuity of the in-service training programme for teachers.

- The residual misgivings in certain quarters about the double shift. This will require a co-ordinated and systematic sensitization campaign.
- In an environment of perpetual resource scarcity, there is always the temptation to syphon the fund of the textbook rental scheme for other purposes thereby jeopardising the viability of the scheme.
- The declining collection rates for the textbook rental fee, which may also threaten the future viability of the scheme.

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