Basic Education, Civil Society Participation and the New Aid Architecture: Lessons from Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali and Tanzania

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Executive Summary

New efforts to revitalize and expand basic education systems have become central to the national development plans of many African countries over the past decade. These new efforts are different from the past on three counts. First, national efforts are supported by the international community on a larger scale than ever before, often through innovative sectoral approaches that fund national education sector plans rather than individual projects. Second, such changes are occurring in a context of political liberalization and democratic consolidation. Finally, new education sector plans now routinely recognize an important role for civil society in the realization of national basic educational goals. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are increasingly expected to be partners in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national educational plans and policies. In this sense, sector programs have opened up greater political space for CSO participation and representation in the education sector policy arena.

In this study, we explore the current capacities and challenges facing civil society organizations as they attempt to engage effectively in these new governance roles, based on fieldwork in four countries: **Kenya, Mali, Tanzania** and **Burkina Faso**. We map the key non-governmental actors active in education and explore their experiences as policy actors in each country. We also ask how these actors are affected by a new architecture for aid to education and for educational governance: one in which bilateral and multilateral donor organizations, national governments and civil society actors are attempting to partner around a recently developed plan for achieving basic Education for All. However, the new aid architecture

If we accept the proposition that civil society participation contributes to all three of these areas, we should be asking not simply: Are civil society actors included in Education Sector programs, but also: Why some CSOs and not others, in some aspects of the program, and not others? More fundamentally, does the presence of CSOs lead to new capacity and effectiveness in citizen-led claims-making? Do they scale up at the national level in the sense of consolidation of formal democratic oversight of the education system?

The Structure and Capacity of Civil Society Actors in the Education Sector

Enormous variation exists across our case countries, suggesting that civil society support will need to be tailored to specific contexts and must not assume harmonized interests or abilities.

Intra-CSO relationships and National Coalitions are extremely varied in their capacities and effectiveness:

- Tanzania's TEN/MET appears to be the most effective in mobilizing a wide range of members around a common policy platform; it also is the most effective critic and watchdog over basic education commitments, at times resulting in tensions with government.
- Kenya's national Elimu Yetu Coalition is quite weak; since the declaration of universal free primary education it seems to have lost the capacity to mobilize its members around a common agenda.
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- Comparing the three emerging principles of aid effectiveness, the focus of sector programs is on enhancing the provision of services, with little clarity on the contributions that civil society actors make to the fabric of formal democracy or to the empowerment of the poor or marginalized.
- By design, the governance of sector programs centres around Ministry of Education-CSO engagement – a dangerous emphasis in contexts where sector funding is controlled by other Ministries, or where the power of the executive has historically limited citizen engagement in formal democratic processes.
- Sector programs do not establish a transparent procedural framework for civil society engagement at the national level, allowing governments to control who sits at the policy table.
- Sector programs tend to employ an imagery of "partnership" around the financing and provision of education, begging the question: do sector programs view private/CSO funding and provision of basic education as "unfortunately necessary" or "inherently desirable"?
- Sector programs assume harmonious, collaborative interaction with CSOs, ignoring the complex political reality of organizations.
- Sector programs not only reinforce longstanding tensions between the service delivery and advocacy roles CSOs play; they also foster administrative confusion about the relative responsibilities of the central state, subnational authorities and CSOs in guaranteeing access to quality basic education.
- Decentralized reform programs add another level of design contradictions (six identified within), including their use to "break" previous civil society leverage, and the little attention paid to the connections between accountability at the grassroots and democratic deliberation at the national level.
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Implications and Key Policy Challenges

a) Why Is Civil Society is Important

Emerging principals of aid effectiveness typically describe civil society as contributing to

c) Providing Better External Support for Civil Society Engagement

External actors face a delicate task when supporting the more "political" of the roles played by civil society actors. They must do so while continuing to support government leadership and ownership of sector programs; in ways that do not imply partisanship; and that do not carry the threat of sanction or hegemony. Nonetheless, our case studies suggest that external actors can assist in seven important ways, such as:

- Dialogue with governments about the establishment of legal frameworks, formal processes and better government receptivity to CSO policy, oversight and public deliberation roles.
- Argue for more transparent, regularized and democratic processes for the inclusion of civil society