

GHANA EDUCATION 2006-2013

Lessons Learned

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Preface

This short Lessons Learned paper was requested as part of the Project completion Review process of DFID's Support to the Education Strategic Plan 2006-2013. The remit was to *"draft a 10 page lessons learned document, drawing on key monitoring and evaluation reports (from both DFID and others) organised to speak to the interests of key stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, managers, government officials and donors) which could help feed the design and implementation as well as propose risks and mitigation strategies of the new sector support programme"*.

Ghana is not short of commentary and analysis of the education sector, and there have been over recent years a number of excellent and influential reports. In addition, MoE generates its own annual Education Sector Performance Report, alongside the annual Education Statistical Reports. Likewise donors generate their own grey literature of reports, commentary and analysis.

Within the time and rubric for this paper it has not been possible to do full justice to this large body of knowledge. The purpose was to extract the key and recurring lessons that emerge and summarise these to inform future decisions. The paper needs to be read in this context.

This assessment is being carried out by HEART (Health & Education Advice & Resource Team).

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Introduction

The education sector looks very different in 2013 from how it did in 2006. The major changes are:

- over 3 million more children enrolled in basic education (a 70% increase),
- over 4,000 more primary schools,
- much improved gender parity, almost at parity at the primary level,
- 15% more children at P6 showing minimum levels of competency in English, and 10% more in Maths, and
- a total education budget nearly GHC 2 billion bigger.

But a number of things look much the same, or worse:

- still over 30% of primary teachers are untrained,
- the number of textbooks students can access has decreased, and
- wide inequalities in funding, access and quality exist between regions and between urban and rural

The demand for education – and good education – is as great now as it was a decade ago

“poor parents and their children are looking up to the schooling system as a pathway out of their misery” (PPVA 2011)

And some of the key challenges that existed still remain, particularly in relation to high levels of teacher absenteeism, low levels of instructional time and an imbalance in education spending between salaries and investment, goods and services.

This paper is organised into six sections:

1. Policy and Commitment
2. Access and equity
3. Education quality
4. Management and Governance
5. Education Financing and Financial Management
6. External support: donors and CSOs

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1 Policy and Commitment

Ghana's aspirations for education are set out in the ten year Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020. The broad goals of the earlier ESP 2003-2015 remain, centred around universal access, improved quality and relevance, and greater efficiency. The new ESP 2010-2020 is expressed more around the organisation and structure of the education system, i.e. by sub-sector.

Ghana has never had difficulty in articulating policy intent and the ESP 2010-2020 sets out the future vision. Contained within this (under the SWOT analysis) are some of the risks that are seen to impinge upon likely success. These include:

- The inequitable distribution of resources and benefits
- Ineffective means of ensuring returns on rising costs
- Official and unofficial absences
- Diminishing public perceptions of the value of education

Where Ghana has had less success is in resolve to implement, in particular to square up to some tough political decisions needed to establish a stronger basis for change.

The recent political economy analysis of education (DFID 2012a) highlights some key concerns. Political accountability for effective service delivery is weak. This is not helped by generally weak public information of real priorities and issues, and the weak use of evidence in making policy choices. Politically, public spending on education is seen as a way to win elections rather than promote long term development goals. Teachers are an important part of the "client networks" essential to winning votes. Thus election promises for reform and change often do not materialise, and the key constraints, particularly around deployment and management of teachers, persist. Political preference remains for high visibility projects: infrastructure or limited but appealing "magpie" ICT ventures.

2 Access and Equity

“although spending on public basic education in Ghana has increased substantially, compared with the rich, the poorest in society appear to have made the smallest gains in terms of participation in basic education.” (Akeampong and Rollerton 2013)

Ghana made strong early progress towards universal basic education, brought about through a series of policy shifts following independence and significantly accelerated through the 1995 Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Programme and, a decade later, with the introduction of the Capitation Grant Scheme (2005).

The most impressive gains since 2006 have been in expanding access to Kindergarten, where GER has risen from 75% to 114%, with more girls enrolled than boys. At primary, GERs have risen from 86% to 105%, with more modest gains experienced at Junior Secondary, the GER rising from 70% to 82%. Increases in access have been uneven, with a number of districts where primary GERs remain below the 2006 average. GER rates, reported in excess of 150% in some districts, show substantial over-aged enrolment, which in turn is associated with subsequent drop-out and low achievement. Girls are more disadvantaged than boys by being over-aged. It is estimated that 40% of children in Primary 1 are aged eight years or above. Ensuring children start school at the right age has not received sufficient attention, though Ghana does not experience high repetition rates.

Recent years have seen growing recognition of this unequal development and policy and programmes shifting towards closing the gap in “deprived districts” through more targeted efforts on both the supply and demand side. Donors and CSOs play a major role in improving services in deprived areas.

The prospects of children in the poorest quintile never having gone to school are about ten times greater than those of children in the richest quintile. If a child lives in a rural area, his or her chances of not having attended school are over three times higher than an urban child. A rural girl from the poorest quintile is 13.9 times more likely to not have attended school than an urban boy from the richest quintile. (World Bank 2011)

CREATE¹ research has added much to our assessment and understanding of access to education. The “zones of exclusion” research found that a little over a third of Primary 1 children are “secure” in their schooling (i.e. they attend regularly and are learning appropriately), by the end of primary this drops to a fifth. Factors that drive non-enrolment are rooted in poverty, the need for child labour, family size and low parental education – and invariably it is a mix of these that keeps children out of school. Supply-side factors also exert influence on whether children go to school or not: the effects of school quality (e.g. good management, effective teaching) are important. Policies therefore need to focus on these factors. As the School for Life experience demonstrates, offering more flexible timing of school that aligns with the economic lives of rural communities helps to overcome the conflict between school and labour.

Gender Parity has improved, with parity having been achieved nationally at KG level, though narrowly missed at primary. Parity worsens at the secondary level, so by Senior High School there are three boys for every two girls enrolled. National averages again mask regional disparities, with a number of districts still showing a GPI below 0.85. A comprehensive review (CAMFED 2012) of the major strategies used to promote girls’ education, reached the following conclusions, summarised in Fig 1 below.

¹ The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition and Equity, funded by DFID, has produced a series of research paper on Ghana. www.ceate-rpc.org

Fig 1: What works in girls' education (CAMFED)

Strategy	Evidence
Scholarships and Stipends	High impact when effectively targeted, best at secondary levels.
School feeding and take home rations	Effective if targeted. Caution over administration time.
Free textbooks and uniforms	Lack of evidence
Female teacher recruitment and training	Especially effective in "conservative cultures" (e.g. the north)
Safe environments	Little evidence, though consensus on impact of gender based violence and need for good school leadership
Distance	Some evidence, success noted with bicycle schemes
Community engagement	Important "wrap around" strategy, no evidence it works on its own. Process is key.
Complementary education	Good evidence, flexibility is key
Peer support and mentoring	Highly prevalent, but little evidence of effect other than increased self-confidence

Others disagree with some of these conclusions: "*The GPI will not change quickly by carrying out sensitization workshops or distributing bicycles*", (World Bank 2011), more sensitive and diverse strategies are needed.

The past decade has seen a steady growth in private schooling. Removing fees from public schooling has not had a dampening effect on private schools. School fees are only part of the cost of schooling, and there is some evidence that the difference in terms of household costs between public and private schooling is not that great, with the latter clearly perceived as offering better quality and value for money. The National Education Assessment (NEA) 2011 reports that private schools are performing better than public schools. Whilst still predominantly an urban phenomenon, private education is now becoming more widespread. In 1991/2 less than 1% of the rural poor accessed private schools, by 2005/6 that had increased to over 10% (Akeampong and Rollerton 2013). Total enrolment in government primary schools declined between 2012 and 2013, but has continued to increase in private schools. The private sector clearly plays an important part in Ghana's progress towards the MDGs, accounting for 23% of total enrolment, yet there are no formal partnership arrangements that build on the comparative advantages of private schooling.

3 The Quality of Education

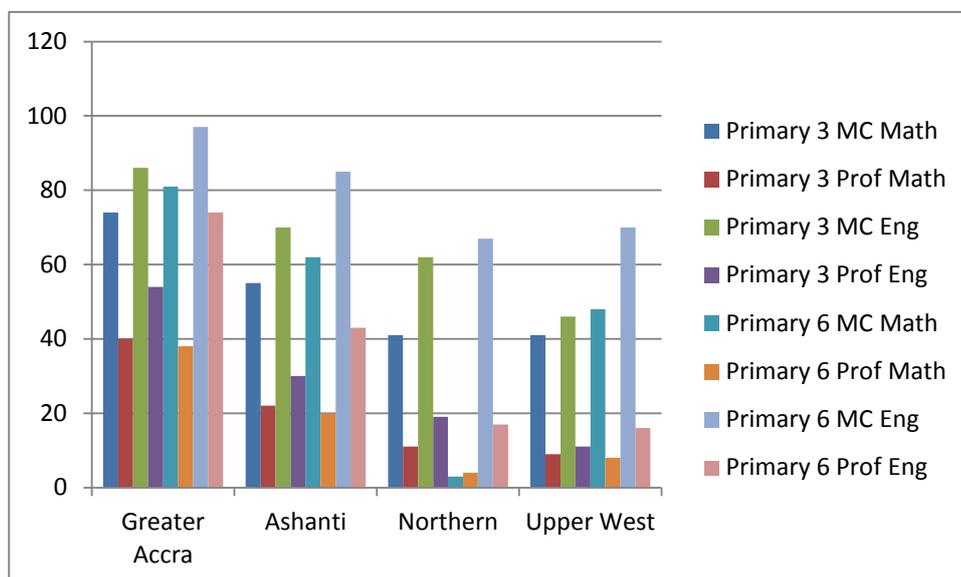
There is now a general consensus that Ghana is failing to deliver on education quality. A major focus of attention has been on teacher training in an attempt to provide a higher proportion of trained teachers. This has met with only partial success: the proportion of trained primary teachers now stands at 76%, only eight percentage points higher than in 2006: supply has just managed to keep up with demand without making headway into the shortfall. But again it is the differences between regions that is most striking, with the north substantially worse off.

The establishment of the Untrained Teacher Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) programme in 2003 has allowed for substantial numbers of teachers to gain qualification in a cost effective way through its open learning approach. There has been no formal assessment of the quality of graduates or comparisons made with the more conventional College of Education based programmes. Recent work² points to a number of ways in which the UTDBE model could be strengthened, particularly with regard to greater levels of mentoring and support for trainees, and greater continuous assessment rather than summative testing.

Having been trained may be one determinant of an effective teaching force, but there are other failures that constrain learning achievement. Ghana records very poor “time on task” resulting from high levels of teacher absenteeism, loss of school days and lesson time which effectively reduces instructional time to 40% of what is expected in a school year of almost 200 days.

Ghana has successfully sustained the bi-annual National Education Assessment since 2005, the fifth round having been completed (though not yet reported) in 2013. Overall these show some improvements in levels of both minimum competency and proficiency, though levels of proficiency are low. Beneath the positive national headlines are the familiar patterns of regional variation: rural children are much less likely to achieve minimum competency levels, and three times less likely to achieve proficiency. Comparing performance across regions shows Greater Accra significantly ahead, with between five and ten times as many pupils achieving proficiency levels compared to Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Volta regions. The differences between Ghana’s top two performing regions (Greater Accra and Ashanti) and the bottom two (Northern and Upper West) are shown in Fig 2 below.

Fig 2: A comparison of Minimum Competency and Proficiency performance between the top two and bottom two regions (from NEA 2011)



² DFID supported consultancy of Chris Yates TED-UTDBE Support Services 2012 and 2013

Aside from the NEA and Ghana's participation in TIMMS, there is no formal assessment of every child's learning achievement until the BECE at the end of grade 9. A key lesson to emerge from the 2003 ESP was the need to be able to effectively measure learning achievement as a basis to drive improvements in quality. The continuing inability to do this remains a significant gap.

The success of establishing initial literacy in a child's mother tongue (L1) is demonstrated in the School for Life programmes – and there is some evidence emerging from the NEA 2011 that points to higher achievement of pupils coming through the NALAP programme. The impact of language on learning is frequently overlooked; recent research (VSO 2013) identifies the language of instruction as the “greatest inhibitor to learning in the classroom” and finds little evidence that NALAP is being used in schools. The report concludes: *“despite high levels of investment in literacy and learning improvement programmes by government and donors, uptake of education improvement programmes would have limited impact”*.

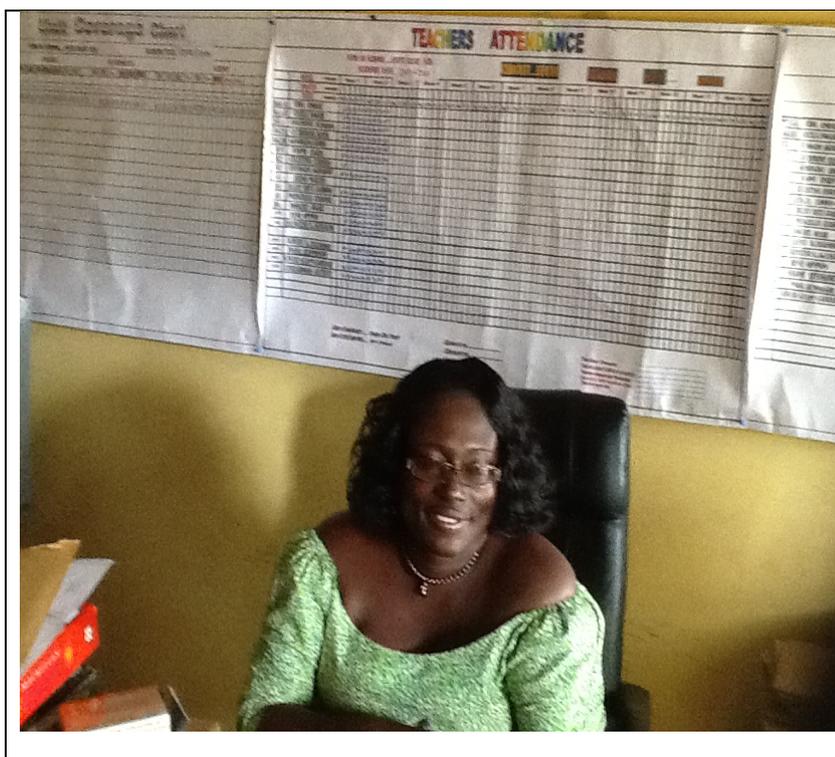
Similarly, if language can exclude children from learning, so too does a strong tendency for teachers to focus on more able, vocal pupils, ignoring the silent majority. This type of ‘exclusion’ is noted in research, but seems to be rarely, if ever, picked up on the agendas for in-service training.

The use of ICT in education in Ghana is limited and largely restricted to a few high profile, politically driven, projects with very limited reach. This has included provision of laptops to senior secondary schools. The recent USAID supported e-reader programme had mixed results, but significantly half of the hardware (tablets) provided were damaged.

In-service training and professional development opportunities for teachers in Ghana, as in many countries, tend to be ad hoc and frequently associated with donor projects. Ghana has adopted a School and Cluster based approach, through which all teachers are supposed to receive a limited number of hours of professional development, delivered by peers or district resource persons in after school sessions close to where they work. Participation is funded through the capitation grant. The model is built on many years of development with substantial support from JICA, though no robust evaluation has been conducted and JICA's own evaluation is inconclusive with regard to impact on the classroom and learning. This “leap of faith” is symptomatic of a wider problem within the education sector, which focuses on activity rather than effectiveness. Furthermore, the subject matter (“topics”) for in-service programmes seems to focus more on particular aspects of the syllabus rather than broader pedagogical skills.

A more effective way of improving learning achievement is associated with the Teacher Community Assistance Initiative (TCAI) through which young volunteers run in- and after-school remedial programmes. In experimental research, this was found to exert a positive effect on test scores, more so than targeting teachers, on account of the combination of intensive basic skill instruction and working with lower performing pupils.

An area of considerable neglect has been school leadership. The importance of good leadership is universally acknowledged; few doubt the “good head, good school” relationship. Research undertaken by UCC (EdQual 2010) showed that pupil motivation and learning improved in schools where heads were actively supported in school self evaluation and focussed on their role in promoting the right conditions for learning.



The charismatic and energetic Head of Efutu Metropolitan Assembly Basic School (Cape Coast), Mrs Evelyn Efua-Panyin. The establishment of simple routines, setting high expectations, maintaining standards and developing a warm and strong rapport with staff, children and their parents has created an effective school that tops the district BECE results table. Asked why there are no problems of teacher or pupil absenteeism, Evelyn answered: *"We're a good school. People want to come to a good school!"* She was quick to point out that what she did was "not rocket science", and though she had had some Headship training, leading by example was vital.

Leadership training remains largely ad hoc, and selection of School Heads is based on length of service rather than any observed potential or suitability for the task. Getting a good Head is more a matter of luck than judgement: and there are good Heads in schools in Ghana. Using them as a resource, through coaching and mentoring programmes for example, to raise standards more generally would seem a profitable strategy.

4 Education Management and Governance

A well developed process for planning, monitoring and reporting on education has developed at central, regional and district level. Thus actions and resource allocations are, at least notionally, aligned to the Education Sector Plan which has through three re-iterations expressed Ghana's intent to improve access, quality and efficiency. Annual Operational Plans are produced at unit level (including districts) and through a process of negotiation and aggregation the three year rolling national Annual Education Sector Operational Plan (AESOP) is updated annually. Resources are linked to the MTEF. Statistical reporting through EMIS feeds the annual Education Sector Performance Report (ESPR) which Ghana has produced. Frequent reviews have reiterated the point that operational plans can only be realised through adequate funds, and the constant pressure on releases of the non-salary recurrent budget makes the AESOP and District Education Operational Plan (DEOP) unachievable.

There is strong evidence that capacity for planning, monitoring and reporting have improved significantly. There are high levels of compliance with the process. Programmes such as USAID's Partnership for Accountable Governance in Education (PAGE) have been effective in building capacity, and the focus on the deprived districts is now seen as having given them some capacity advantage over non-deprived districts. The active presence of many CSO in the north of Ghana plays a vital role in supporting service delivery.

Emphasis has been very much on building systems and the focus at all levels is strongly around compliance: undertaking the sequence of activities in a timely way, generating plans, reporting on actions and expenditures. Whilst this may have created a strong culture of compliance it has not created an equally strong culture of enquiry after results. The National Inspectorate Board (NIB) has attempted to set out basic standards more clearly, through its *Learning, not just schooling* publication, but this is not yet widely disseminated or used. There is therefore no coherent way in which basic standards are set, communicated and then used to manage schools.

In the absence of commonly understood and agreed standards, accountability for service delivery remains weak. Despite great emphasis at the district level that is placed on supervision of schools through the network of circuit supervisors (as one District Director said "supervision is the key"), accountability remains weak. There is weak resolve in challenging the steady erosion of instructional time, with inadequate routines of reporting on performance. The newly introduced School Report Card, which captures key attendance information, is a promising initiative, but seems to be seen more as another data capture requirement rather than a living tool to manage improvement. Sanctions are very rarely used to censor ill-discipline, and there are no obvious incentives to encourage, recognise and reward good performance. In short, there is no real difference whether something is done well or badly.

Ghana has been slow in taking forward the decentralisation process and there remains lack of clarity and conviction around the future course of action. This continued ambivalence has an impact on central departments whose future roles and mandates are unclear: Teacher Education and Inspection being two cases in point. Furthermore, progress in operationalizing the new semi-autonomous agencies the CTE, NCCA and NIB has been slow, contributing to a degree of apathy and loss of morale.

Ghana has long recognised the importance of communities in education. They play a vital role in determining access and are also seen as having influence over what goes on in schools. Recent analysis (World Bank 2011) estimates that whereas School Management Committees (SMC) exists in over 80% of schools, they only appear to be functional in around 60%. Research in the north of Ghana (VSO 2013) stresses the key role that communities play, but also reports "fatigue"

with constant demands to compensate for failures in the system (e.g. paying stipends to volunteer teachers) and not getting response to frequently voiced concerns. There is a degree of loss of confidence by school communities in the system. The increasing migration of better-off children and parents into the private sector, which offers a better option for meeting their educational needs, further weakens the voice of remaining communities to exert influence.

Arguably, Ghana's single biggest challenge centres around the deployment and management of the teaching force; the impact of this failure is pervasive: The "randomness" (World Bank 2011) that results in the uneven distribution of teachers is described by MoE: "*The inequitable deployment of teachers is arguably the most regressive feature of the education sector*" (AESOP 2012-2014).

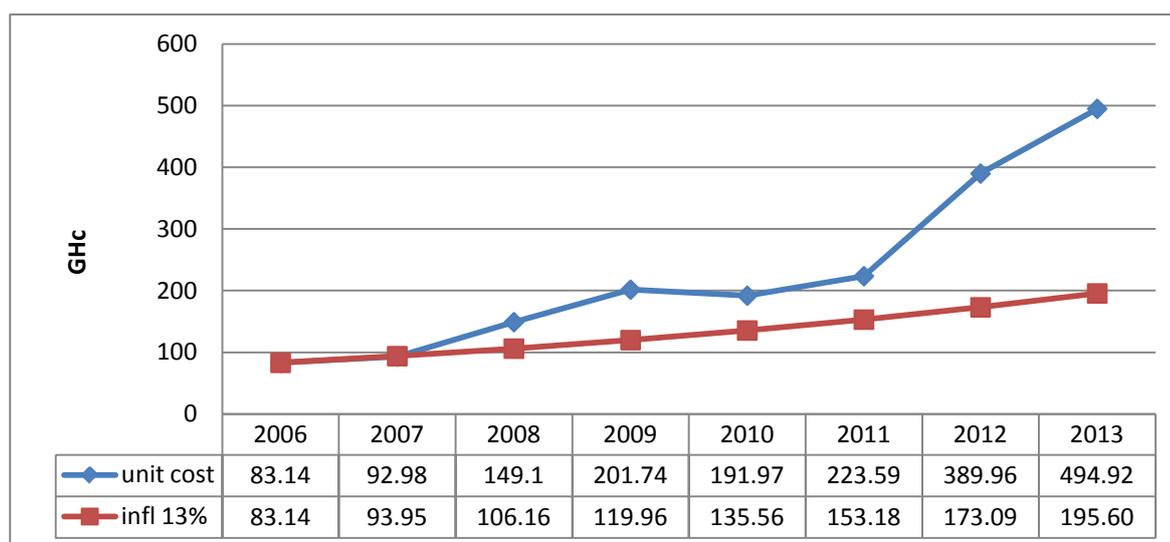
Thus, the major constraint in converting high levels of expenditure into better educational outcomes is the "*failure to control, mobilise, allocate, train and incentivise key resource – teachers – to deliver good standards in the classroom.*" (DFID 2012b)

Political and bureaucratic will has been weak in tackling this issue, and though the ESP sets out ambitious targets for ensuring greater efficiency based on the "mini-max" model, real progress has been slow. Donor influence has not been strong: the combined levers of sector level support and general budget support have failed to do more than scratch the surface. There is no shortage of analysis: all major reports produced over the past decade continue to point in the same direction. The recent political economy analysis (DFID 2012a) highlights the need for a collective effort within Ghana involving various arms of government and, most importantly, the Teacher Unions, in setting a more "transformational agenda" for change.

5 Education Financing and Financial Management

The proportion of public resources that Ghana devotes to education is amongst the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa and, at an estimated 8.4% (2012) of GDP is well above accepted benchmarks. Education consumes 29% of the total Government expenditure: it is the biggest and most costly sector, employing over half the public work force. Unit costs have risen steadily over the past eight years, far in excess of the rate of inflation, see Fig 3 below.

Fig 3: Annual Unit cost per primary pupil 2006-2013



Again, the familiar story of uneven distribution of resources applies: per child expenditures vary considerable across Ghana. The last major comprehensive study of the sector (World Bank 2011) concluded that “a key source of deprivation for the deprived districts is the allocation of public expenditure”. Analysis pointed to marked discrimination in resource allocations to deprived districts, where the northern regions have between 45% and 93% of their children in districts with sub-standard per child expenditures. The report has been catalytic in the subsequent drive to redress the imbalance, including the focus of the GPE Grant exclusively on the deprived districts.

The role of the private sector in supporting government policy of universal basic education cannot be under-estimated. Simple arithmetic points to enrolment in private schools effectively “saving” the government over GHc 850m a year based on current public unit costs and over 1.6 million children in private basic schools.

The recent Fiduciary Risk Assessment of the education sector (DFID 2012b) re-affirmed early analysis that, in addition to the inability to effectively manage the key resource of teachers, poor financial control of the payroll and the consequent squeezing out of non-salary recurrent funds for service delivery and investment, results in a failure to influence the quality of education. Furthermore, the little of what is left for goods and services often arrives too late in the school year to be of benefit.

There are also major problems with financial reporting and audit processes, with technical assistance being more ad hoc than strategic in nature. Consequently, fiduciary risk is assessed as being high or substantial. In part this is the result of the fragmented nature of education financing, whereby funds derive from and flow through diverse sources and channels – all of which presses already limited capacity in Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDA) to allocate and account efficiently.

6 External Support: Donors and CSOS

All donor activity in Ghana is, notionally at least, tied into the ESP and a broad sector dialogue constructed around the National Education Sector Annual Review (NESAR), the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and various sub-groups. A close and cordial partnership has developed over the past two decades. Loosely the arrangement may be described as a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) though few donors (DFID and World Bank) have committed to financing through the sector budget. The sector is not crowded, having five key players: DFID, World Bank, USAID, UNICEF and JICA, with the Israeli Embassy also involved in KG education.

Donors for the most part pursue their own projects and programmes, which respond to some extent to the priorities of the ESP. This is perhaps more a comment on the breadth of the ESP and its ability to accommodate all interests, rather than a collective agreement and pursuit of core priorities. The fact that the binding constraints of payroll control, teacher rationalisation, performance management and budgetary imbalance are not central in the collective donor dialogue is a result of this loose alliance and pursuit of particular project interests. External financing constitutes around 2.5% of total annual education spending: an amount that GoG could quite easily generate through some relatively soft efficiency reforms. However, it is the inability to direct funds to non-salary expenditures and the fact that external resources (whether on budget or through projects) provide much of the impetus for goods and services that allows donors considerable voice.

External funds therefore largely substitute those of government and as such are more palliative than catalytic or transformational, with poor prospects of eventual sustainability. Much donor activity has a restricted geographical focus, working to initiate reform or embed improved practice in a select number of districts. The assumption is that such piloting will eventually be scaled up and funded through domestic resources. There have been examples of wider initial reform, linked to stated policy imperatives, that have failed to sustain: NALAP is one such example, as is the School Education Assessment (SEA) both funded by USAID.

Development Partners are seen therefore as being helpful and useful, relatively high transaction costs in terms of time and procedures are tolerated in return for the goods and services they bring which MoE/GES would struggle to provide given recurrent resource constraints. Ideally the relationship should combine both support, based on openness and mutual trust which do exist, and challenge – a willingness to collaborate on the major issues that ultimately lead to sustainable change. By circumventing the really key challenges, and not placing these central to policy dialogue, and DFID is in the strongest position to do this as the provider of sector budget support, donors to some extent become complicit in the inefficiencies that persist and continue to pull against lasting change.

CSOs play an important role in service delivery. They are not particularly well organised in Ghana, though the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition attempts some coordination. Emphasis is very much on plugging holes in the supply of services and little emphasis is placed on the “challenge function” and advocacy role. Civil Society and the media are “*unfocussed on the policy issues*” (DFID 2012a). There are perhaps perverse incentives here, as the space for CSOs is opened up by persisting inequalities and government failure to provide. CSOs are unlikely to bite the hand that, albeit rather indirectly, feeds them.

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