

Lessons from aid to education in India and Kenya

Christopher Colclough (University of Cambridge), Anuradha De (CORD, New Delhi), and Andrew Webb (University of Cambridge)¹

Summary

Over the years since 1990 a number of significant changes have occurred as regards the importance placed by the governments of India and Kenya upon expanding and improving primary schooling. This has coincided with a period during which the international community has placed major priority upon such investment, and has included the objective of achieving universal primary education (UPE) as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Each of these countries' relationships with donors to education have become closer over the period, and each have had changes in aid modalities, away from projects towards programme funding. This policy brief examines how relationships between donors and recipient countries have influenced the content and conduct of education policy. Comparisons between the two countries are made in order to investigate the extent to which internationally accepted principles of good aid practice have affected the way aid is allocated and used. The findings are relevant to a number of similar aid contexts in the developing world.

Education Background

India:

A definitive push toward a national system of free compulsory primary education began in India during the pre-independence period under British colonial rule. The East India Company had assumed responsibility for state education in 1813, followed shortly by missionary schools in the 1820s, and many elite Indians considered the modern reforms brought by the British to surpass the traditional brahminical system. However, the incorporation of English into Indian education, and the inequalities which it helped entrench, would remain disputed for many years (Mehrotra 2006). For many commentators, the colonial approach to the education system was, on the whole, an 'ideological apparatus' aimed at legitimising the privileges enjoyed by the few, but it nonetheless provided the catalyst for a synthesis of Western and Indian knowledge (Kumar 2006).

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the help of Wycliffe Otieno who participated in the interviews in Kenya. They also wish to acknowledge DFID's funding of the RECOUP programme, whilst absolving them from responsibility for any of the views expressed herein.

Whilst the concept of a national system of education was germinating in the early 20th century, the influence of Gandhi, who opposed 'colonial' education and proposed *basic education* for the masses as a means of achieving social transformation, was strengthening (Ghosh 2000). Partly by consequence, education policy changed over the following decades, with greater emphasis being placed on the need to achieve equitable educational provision, across the ethnic, geographical, caste and gender divides (Kumar 2006). Universalising access to primary education has therefore been a formal priority in India throughout long periods of its recent history, albeit with very mixed success in terms of its implementation. It was not unwelcome, therefore, to the Indian state, that the international development discourse began to assert similar priorities from the late 1980s onwards.

The state-implemented District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) which began in 1993-94, supported by the World Bank, and later by other bilateral donors, marked the first acceptance of external aid to primary education "as a matter of policy" in post-independence India (Sadgopal 2006, p.108). In 2003, a newly elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government further changed the government's policy on aid; terminating its agreements with all except six large bilateral donors and switching to a sector wide approach (SWAp) using programme-based funding from a pool into which donors paid. The resulting flagship programme, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), intended to universalise elementary education in India, has produced higher enrolment rates, with GER increasing from 94 to 113 between 2003 and 2007 (UNESCO 2010). Nevertheless, the retention and quality of education (particularly teacher supply and school facilities) remain problematical issues (Rustagi 2009; Mehrotra 2006).

Kenya:

Prior to independence, education in Kenya was segregated according to 'racial' groupings. African children were afforded few opportunities of formal education, being restricted to mission-run schools with limited state funding. Upon gaining power at independence, measures to implement the Kenya African National Union's (KANU) election promise to provide free universal primary education were introduced. Primary gross enrolment ratios (GER) rose from around 60 to 79 between 1964 and 1970, indicating that a major expansion of the primary school system had indeed been achieved (Somerset 2009, 235). Budgetary constraints and competing priorities higher up the system, however, meant that school fees remained in place. Despite numerous attempts to eradicate them, parents would continue to shoulder the cost of education in Kenya over the following thirty years through "self-help" movements providing the

additional classrooms and teachers' houses which were required as schools expanded.

Kenyan education, up to the end of the twentieth century was therefore defined by quantitative problems of high drop-out levels, fluctuating enrolment levels and an insufficient infrastructure to meet enrolment demands. In addition, there were serious shortcomings in the quality of education, both in terms of teacher-pupil ratios, pupil-textbook ratios, and regional and gendered disparities (Kimalu et al. 2001; Alwy and Schech 2004).

In 2002 a National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government gained power in Kenya under the leadership of Mwai Kibaki. Despite earlier failed attempts to expand education in a sustainable way, the new government, like its predecessors, made education a centrepiece of their electoral manifesto and quickly implemented a free primary education initiative in 2003 resulting in an increase of 1.3 million enrolments by the following year. This was shortly followed by the design and implementation of the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP), a 'sector-wide approach' to educational planning and financing, designed with strong donor support. Between 2002 and 2005 enrolments showed a growth of 7.4% per year compared with just 1.5% between 1996 and 2002.

The main difference between these two countries' design and adoption of a SWAp, lay in the influence that aid donors had in the design and implementation of the associated educational policies. In the case of India, although pressure had been placed on the government to accept foreign aid (see below), national policy priorities remained relatively unaltered, whereas in Kenya, the government was in a considerably weaker position, both in terms of its planning capacity and its financing requirements. The aid context is therefore of importance for developing an understanding of how these changes came to pass.

The Aid Context

The cases of India and Kenya differ as regards their history of accepting aid for education (Colclough and De 2010; Colclough and Webb 2010). Kenya has had a long history of post-independence aid, but until the turn of the century, relationships with overseas donors were volatile and fractious (Mwega 2009). India, by contrast, received little aid to education prior to 1990, despite being one of the top three recipients of total net aid until the 1980s, and despite some 30-40 million children of primary-school age remaining out of school in India during the 1980s. The Indian government was deeply committed to avoiding further international influence on its educational policies, and had decided to avoid accepting aid for education for that reason. Donors, on the other hand, recognised the influence India would have – because of its sheer size and its level of under-enrolment – as a determinant of global progress towards achieving UPE. Considerable donor pressure was placed on the Indian government to accept aid albeit initially with only limited success.

The significant turning point was the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, when aid agencies and governments agreed to prioritise the achievement of UPE over the following decade. India and Kenya were party to these resolutions, and indeed the Indian Minister of Education had had a prominent role in advocating them at the conference. Primary education subsequently became the main focus of both government and donor spending. However, did this change of

focus arise from newly perceived national priorities or mainly from the strongly stated sentiments of the international community, particularly the agencies? How much was the new emphasis genuinely owned by these governments, and how grounded was the commitment to reform?

Principles for aid Relationships

In March 2005, a step-change in the relationship between aid donors and recipients was signalled by a new international agreement about the ways in which aid would be agreed and delivered. The Paris Declaration promised that donor agencies would align themselves behind the objectives for poverty reduction set by developing countries themselves, they would utilise local systems to deliver and track aid resources, they would coordinate and share information amongst themselves to avoid duplication, and both donor and recipient authorities would be mutually accountable for the results achieved (OECD DAC 2005).

These principles were further extended three years later, at a follow-on conference in Accra. Henceforth, it was agreed that donors would provide information on their planned programmes 3-5 years in advance, they would use country systems to deliver aid, rather than donor systems, and they would not impose their own conditions on how and when the aid resources would be used – rather they would use conditions based upon recipient countries' own development targets and objectives (Accra Agenda for Action 2008). Although these principles had for some years been informally accepted by some of these parties as being, in principle, desirable, the actual practice of aid was often far from meeting their aspirations.

From Principles to Practice?

The research provides evidence for the impact of aid on education policy in India and Kenya by examining key similarities and differences between the two countries in order to understand how influential international principles of good practice have been to the respective education systems. Drawing on empirical evidence from interviews with government officials and key personnel from multilateral agencies, bilaterals and NGOs, the research demonstrates the extent to which changes made to the planning, funding and monitoring of education in Kenya and India have been successful in improving the quantity and quality of schooling, and assesses whether donor intervention has helped or hindered this process.

The main findings of the research are that aid to education has had a greater impact upon the substance of education policy in Kenya than in India, but in both countries it has strongly affected the transparency and accountability of planning and spending in the sector. Nevertheless, the Paris and Accra accords have so far had limited impact upon the aid process, and where they have influenced aid practice, the burden of change has fallen much more heavily on recipients than donors.

In Kenya, fiscal and technical reliance on donors was greater than in India – where the economy was growing rapidly. Partly by consequence, the education policies which were developed by the Kenyan government were more substantively influenced by external donors. In India, donor involvement was mainly accepted by the government in order to gain lessons from their considerable experience and expertise. Despite the

establishment of international principles of good donor practice which emphasised the national ownership of policies, greater alignment and mutual accountability between donors and recipients, the project demonstrates how complex these principles are to operationalize, and how relationships between each party can become strained as a result.

Policy Points

- The research reveals that the relationships underpinning donor-recipient transactions affect the impact that aid can have on education policy. In India, despite pressure from aid agencies and initial resistance from the government, agreements were struck which enabled intense discussions between both parties to be held during regular joint review meetings, and for education to be effectively monitored. That being so, by keeping its strong ownership of policy, and keeping donors at arm's length, India was able to keep the policy dialogue mainly focussed upon technical matters of implementation rather than broader concerns. In Kenya, donor misgivings over transparency and corruption governed much of the early dealings with the government, but since 2002, these concerns have been much reduced. Yet, suspicion remains amongst some of the parties in both countries that hidden agendas and politics characterise discussions which otherwise appear to be 'open', thus preventing full transparency and effective evaluation.
- The quantity of aid transferred is not a good index of policy influence. In the case of India, more aid was received for education over the past two decades than was the case in virtually all other states. But because planning was strong, implementation relatively efficient, and because Indian policy goals were shared by donors, the latter's impact on the design of policy was marginal. By contrast, in the Kenyan case, despite a similar sharing of policy goals, the comparative weakness of the Kenyan administration led to donors having a greater influence on policy design. More generally, the quantitative aspects of education funding and implementation are less important influences upon the preservation of national sovereignty and policy ownership than are the politics of designing, funding and implementing national educational development.
- The Indian and Kenyan cases are useful models for other developing country contexts - both as regards the ways in which sectoral funding has been managed, and how relationships with donors can be improved. Specific lessons include the necessity of having strong administrative personnel within the recipient ministry, to help ensure transparent monitoring of financial flows, and to provide the capability of engaging in open debates about education policy whilst maintaining a firm stance over national priorities and ownership. Persistence is required from both parties for the timely coordination of budget calendars and processing of reports.
- Careful monitoring of sectoral progress and expenditures improves efficiency and reduces corruption. In both countries, aid was instrumental in improving the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the government's financial systems for education in the following ways: firstly the technical

inputs, experience and constructive criticism given by the international donors helped to improve processes of planning and implementation; secondly, donor participation helped to keep discussions of domestic education at centre stage and helped intensify its supervision; finally, the pooling of aid – at least from some of the agencies – led to efficiency savings in terms of reporting and monitoring performance.

- The dynamic created by international principles of donor practice reveals much about how recipient governments 'fend off' donor influence in order to maintain policy ownership. Whether in fact this will remain possible for the least developed countries, given the influence that international goals such as the MDGs have on the practice of policy, is a question that remains open.

References

- Accra Agenda for Action (2008) *Accra agenda for action*. Final Draft, High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Accra 2-4 September
- Alwy, A. & Schech, S. (2004) "Ethnic inequalities in education in Kenya" in *International Education Journal*. Vol 5(2): 266-274
- Colclough, C. & De, A. (2010) "The Impact of Aid on Education Policy in India" in *International Journal of Educational Development*. Vol.30(5): 497-507
- Colclough, C. & Webb, A. 2010, "The Impact of Aid on Education Policy in Kenya", CEID, Cambridge, (mimeo)
- Ghosh, S.C. (2000) *The history of education in modern India* (revised and updated version). Orient Longman: New Delhi
- Kimalu, P., Nafula, N., Manda, D.K., Mwabu, G. et al. (2001) *Education indicators in Kenya*. KIPPRA Working Paper No.4
- Kumar, R. (ed.) (2006) *The crisis of elementary education in India*. Sage: London; New Delhi
- Mehrotra, S. (ed.) (2006) *Economics of elementary education in India: the challenge of public finance, private provision and household costs*. Sage: New Delhi; London
- Mwega, F. (2009) *A Case study of aid effectiveness in Kenya. Volatility and fragmentation of foreign aid, with a focus on health*. Wolfensohn Center for development. Working paper 8
- Rustagi, P. (ed.) (2009) *Concerns, conflicts and cohesions : universalization of elementary education in India*. Oxford University Press: Oxford; New Delhi
- Sadgopal, A. (2006) "Dilution, distortion and diversion: a post-Jomtien reflection on the education policy" in Kumar, R. (ed.) *The crisis of elementary education in India*. Sage: London; New Delhi
- Somerset, A. (2009) "Universalising primary education in Kenya: the elusive goal" in *Comparative Education*. Vol. 45(2): 233-250
- UNESCO (2010) Statistical Yearbooks Database. Available from world wide web: http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143&IF_Language=eng. Accessed 15th September 2010