Why is educating East Africa's nomads so hard?

Nomads make up around six percent of the population of Africa yet most attempts to provide education for them have been unsuccessful. Education for All targets cannot be met until the twenty African states with nomadic populations do more to increase pastoralists' participation in basic and non-formal education.

A publication from the African Development Bank and UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning assesses services to nomadic children and adults in East Africa. It suggests ways to try to raise the proportion of nomadic children enrolled in school, particularly girls, closer to national averages.

Most programmes for the education of nomads have assumed that settlement is inevitable and beneficial. However, policymakers need to realise that dryland pastoralism is not all inefficient and that not all pastoralists are chronically poor. Pastoralism is probably a more efficient mode of exploiting arid lands than any currently available alternative.

The most important reason for low enrolments in pastoral communities is mostly parents worrying that education will lead children away from their traditional way of life. Non-formal and distance education can help to reduce these fears. The authors consider the objectives, curriculum, delivery methods, timetabling and relevance of a wide range of programmes. They show that:

- education may pose problems for nomads by being poor quality, culturally distant and delivered in a language that is not familiar in an environment that is not welcoming
- insensitive education can divide families: children may end up distanced from both
- arguments that pastoralists either have a negative attitude towards education, or have rejected it, are unconvincing
- evidence on the impact of pastoral education projects is limited.

Increasing enrolments among pastoralists must become a priority. There is a need for national strategies, developed together with representatives of pastoral communities. Nomadic groups must perceive what they are being offered as an improvement to what they already have. It is vital that education addresses issues of mobility, remoteness, poor teacher motivation, parental 'ignorance', child labour and curriculum relevance.

The authors urge educational planners to:

- do more to understand the role nomad children play in their household's economy and why they do not attend school
- take education to children, instead of only offering distant schools – thus forcing them to abandon herding
- provide a mixture of open and distance learning with a short period of residential schooling
- offer greater formal recognition of achievements in non-formal education
- allow parents to remain involved with the physical and moral security of their children (especially girls)
- realise that public policy can stimulate and reward change in traditional attitudes that devalue girls' education.

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Flexible models for primary teacher training in Africa

In Africa, at least 20 countries are at risk of failing to meet the Education for All targets. If reasonable student to teacher ratios are to be put in place, increasing the number and quality of teachers in primary education is essential. A more flexible approach to training is emerging.

The demand for teachers has risen substantially in sub-Saharan Africa due to Universal Primary Education targets, increasing enrolments and the loss of many teachers to HIV and AIDS. In some countries a substantial proportion are untrained or underqualified teachers.

Research by the UK Department for International Development looks at three aspects of distance education teacher training: models of decentralised management; student support and assessment of classroom practice; and choice of technology. It examines the range of new training programmes being established to meet the growing demand for teacher training in Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Malawi.

The study finds that a new model of teacher education – the field-based model – is emerging in sub-Saharan Africa. Distance education is one element of this. Characteristics of the new trend include:

- creating ministry-led national teacher education strategies, framed in the context of reform of the entire sector
- setting up teacher education directorates, in-service training units and various ministry bodies as independent cost centres which are responsible for developing and managing central policy
- providing standardised, accredited pre-service and in-service training
- implementing flexible open and distance learning (ODL) methods, designing new roles for existing providers and transferring training and support tasks to the level of district, zone and school
- common use of print-based materials and little use of ICT-based programmes.

There needs to be local-level student support and assessment. The report issues guidelines for distance education programme planners:

- adopt a continuing plan and a flexible model integrating distance education and face-to-face delivery
- use feasibility studies, audits and baseline studies to determine what institutions and expertise already exist and could be pulled into a support system
- encourage governments to be transparent about the budget; consult all those involved; and negotiate the distribution of resources, responsibilities and incentives
- build the delivery and support network in a way that links all those involved
- prioritise student support as the key element for success and take time to ensure that delivery is effective.

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Promoting peace through non-formal education

Financial constraints on post-conflict reconstruction programmes often lead to the neglect of educational needs of the present generation in favour of the next. Evidence suggests, however, that improving adult literacy and numeracy levels can help promote peacebuilding and reconciliation.

A paper from the University of Sussex analyses projects in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Sudan and shows how combining literacy, conflict resolution and peace building (LCRP) initiatives can contribute to personal healing, development, forgiveness, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Analysts have shown how traumatised children can benefit from the routine and security provided by schooling. Few, however, have looked at the benefits for adults or asked whether the education system may have contributed to the conflict by reproducing the values and prejudices of dominant groups.

The study draws on models of adult literacy and community development developed by the Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire, and combines them with methodologies used by Christian agencies with a firm basis in healing and forgiveness. Participants' practical needs for literacy and numeracy are addressed and they are encouraged to undertake situational and conflict analyses in order to begin to address their circumstances. Materials written by learners are used.

Programme designers need to:
- analyse the roots of the conflict as part of the conflict resolution process
- ensure that those mediating between parties are neutral and able to listen to the perceptions of both sides and to seek every possible point of agreement
- not use traditional literacy models, but instead focus on the aspirations and needs of learners
- emphasise context-related literacy, critical analysis and problem solving, prioritising active and creative methods of learning such as dialogue, discussion, group work and role play.

Literacy groups cannot take the place of medical, psychiatric and conflict resolution services, but can provide a place of safety and a space for accepting the past and daring to think of the future. Recognising the physical, psychological and emotional signs of trauma and post-traumatic stress is important for both facilitators and literacy participants. As trauma, grief and loss are addressed, the literacy component is reduced as the emotions take precedent.

The author calls on donor and humanitarian agencies to:
- recognise the contribution of education, adult education and adult literacy to reconstruction and peacebuilding
- support integrated LCRP programmes for all refugee and IDP communities
- move away from a set curriculum to one relevant to the local situation and determined by the participants themselves
- introduce peace education and human rights into the school curriculum
- realise that participating in educational programmes provides significant benefits to adults – a feeling of progress, return to normality, connecting with culture and community history and taking control of their destiny and the future of their community.

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How does distance education for teachers benefit communities?

For four decades, distance education has helped reduce shortages of primary school teachers. Distance education allows teachers to train without leaving their homes, families and jobs. How does this benefit their wider community?

Research has suggested that as many as half of the developing world's teachers may be unqualified by their own countries' standards. Increasing the numbers of qualified teachers is an enormous task, especially taking into account the high cost of traditional teacher training. Governments need to consider alternative, cost-efficient ways to train sufficient numbers.

In the past ten years, distance education has become widely used. A number of challenges remain for this form of teacher training, such as how to train students in the practical side of teaching, and what methods could better promote two-way interaction between students and their tutors. By exploring possible solutions to these issues, distance education programmes reach out into the community.

A study by the International Extension College examines how training teachers by distance education reaches beyond the students themselves and aids development in the wider community. Local researchers undertook studies in Guyana, Uganda and Nigeria. The research found that:
- Teacher training through distance education produces credible and competent teachers and promotes change and development in the teachers, their schools and communities.
- Distance education study was found to promote family stability, which is considered to be very important, given the critical roles and obligations of individuals in the extended family group.
- However, current students indicated that they were spending less time with their families, and that study strained their relationships with their spouses.
- Distance education-trained teachers became more involved in community activities such as community development associations, youth clubs, religious groups and local politics.
- Teachers who qualified through distance education earned their communities' respect, pride and confidence in recognition of their success in training.

A wide range of people who benefited indirectly were also identified, including conventional teacher educators, local head teachers, teachers, inspectors and local administrators.

The study lists a large number of implications for policy, including the following:
- Policymakers should think about integrating local community development initiatives: for instance, planned use of distance education resource centres for supporting other community-based initiatives.
- Distance education promotes equal opportunities in education, which in turn will create a demand that policymakers need to recognise and respond to.
- Distance education does not require much physical infrastructure, but there is a need to redefine job descriptions for positions that can offer support and skills in delivery of training.
- Governments should consider giving their official approval and funding to support the distance education approach to teacher training.

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