

C o n c l u s i o n

From technical
issues to politics
and policies:
towards a pact
for education
which serves
the general
interest

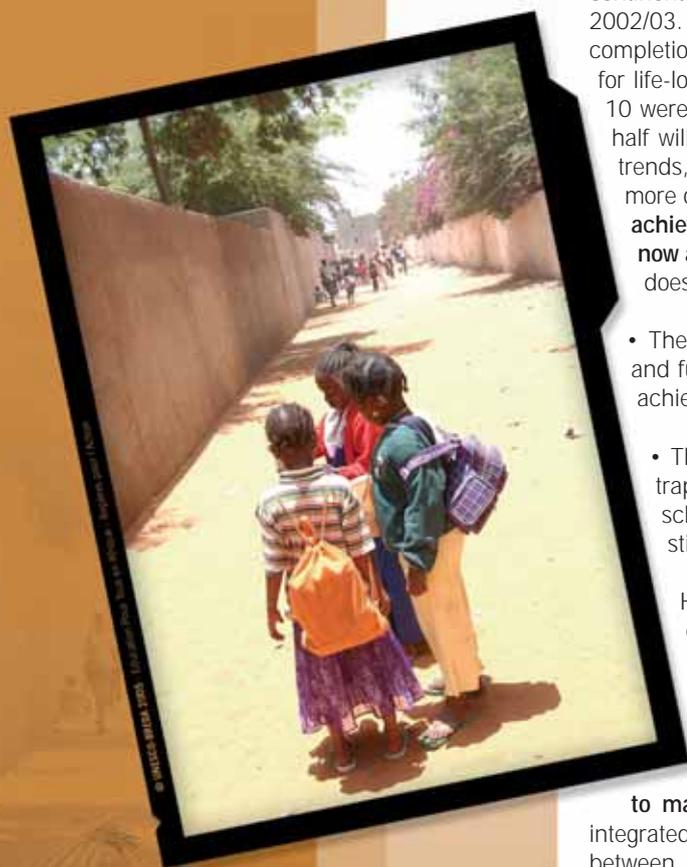
5.1 Responses to meet the challenge

So far, genuine progress has been made by the majority of African countries. In particular, massive efforts have gone into increasing the capacity of education systems to accommodate children. On average, access to the first grade of the primary cycle has increased across the continent: from 7 out of 10 children in 1990/91 to 9 children in 10 in 2002/03. However, there is still a long way to go from initial access to the completion of a full cycle of primary education, which lays the foundation for life-long literacy. In 2002/03, an average of 4 African children out of 10 were still failing to complete the primary cycle, meaning that around half will not go on to become permanently literate. Forecasts of future trends, based on how the systems are currently organised, are hardly more optimistic: **the majority of African countries are not on course to achieve the goal of high quality universal primary education between now and 2015.** If the scale of the response in terms of education policy does not improve radically, this will have two major consequences :

- The first consequence will be the exclusion of millions of children and future adults from the social and economic benefits linked to the achievement of lasting literacy.
- The second consequence will be the perpetuation of the poverty trap in Africa because of the failure to reach the critical threshold of schooling that enables all of the other investments to bear fruit, thus stimulating long-term growth.

However, the analysis presented in this report, based on real examples that are representative of the rest of the continent, shows that national solutions are capable of responding to the challenge. In reality, there is considerable room for manoeuvre in the mobilization of internal resources, choice of education policy and the pedagogical and administrative management of these systems. **The countries therefore have the opportunity to make significant progress.** How well this room for manoeuvre is integrated into public education policies could make all the difference between the stagnation and success of the education system. And success, allied to a clearly-stated national resolve is a powerful incentive for the international funding that is essential for the achievement of the Education For All goals in Africa.

The ambition of this report is to demonstrate the feasibility of the major educational goals. As its authors are well aware, it is limited by the fact that this technical demonstration is only effective when the political and institutional context is favourable. As yet, this context is not positive enough to encourage the adoption and implementation of voluntarist public policies. Here too, things can change and the authors share the conviction that **the same potential for progress exists in the institutional and political environment as at the financial and technical levels.** Thus, it is important to analyse any obstacles of an institutional and political nature, and to consider how to manage these constraints in order to make best use of the room for manoeuvre that exists at the financial and technical levels. For this to happen, there is a logical need to clarify the pact established in Dakar in 2000 at national and international levels for the benefit of the generation of children who represent Africa's future.



5.2 The political economics of the success of the EFA goals

It is essential to resolve the following contradiction: as a whole, EFA goals are shared by the leaders of education systems, but the choices of education policies (including choosing not to make a choice) appear to lack consistency with these very goals, and are sometimes in opposition to them. As an example, this is what happens in many countries, where priority is allegedly given to the goal of Universal Primary Education, but where, in reality, the most significant progress is seen in the cycles of secondary and higher education.

These contradictions cannot be understood without first recognising the existence of an institutional and political constraint that is particularly strong in Africa: **the difficulty to make the general interest emerge from the public decision-making process**. There are two possible explanations for this problem.

The first explanation relates to the **unequal abilities of the different groups of participants in the education system to make their voices heard**. The most disadvantaged of these groups is made up of children without access to schooling. Not only are these children excluded from the education system, they also belong to the social groups that are least able to participate in public debates (children from poor, mainly rural families, with high rates of illiteracy). Conversely, certain groups are able to exert a disproportionate influence over the decision-making process: students, professionals (senior administrative managers and teachers), parents of pupils in the secondary cycle, etc.

The second explanation seems to be linked to the **politico-administrative operation of education systems**, which tends to favour the horizontal management of the stated interests rather than ranking all of the interests (whether stated or not) in order of priority in accordance with their power to achieve the system's ultimate objectives. Several such examples can be given. Firstly, at the institutional organisation level, when several technical ministries are involved in managing a system, it seems difficult to establish any overall regulation of the system when there is no higher authority to perform this function. Then, at the operational level, there is a tendency to manage the interests of each category on a day-to-day basis, rather than using methods that afford equal protection to all users of the system.

What is important is whether or not an organised system actually exists, because an approach to education which fails to embrace the goals of universalization in its lower levels and does not target the needs of the job market in its upper level makes the issues of prioritising and regulation much more difficult for those who are in charge of policy. Priorities and regulations involve a cost for certain sub-sectors or participants and if the benefits produced by the system do not justify this cost, it is much more difficult to implement policy decisions, especially when in education, more than in any other field, costs are immediate and benefits are only seen much later.

These political economics considerations allow to re-introduce the rationality of the actors into education systems, instead of seemingly incoherent behaviour. They also allow us to understand why developments in education systems tend to be peripheral when fundamental modifications seem to be called for. **Thus, if we are to move from the status quo towards decisive reforms, it seems appropriate to re-examine the rules that govern education from every angle**. We can do this firstly by making sure that everyone connected with the educational community is involved with the decisions, and secondly, by ensuring that the State is the guarantor of an explicit pact for education.

For expertise to be useful it must be put to good use in an institutional and political environment favourable to trade-offs

The unequal capacity of the players to make their voices heard and the dispersal of decision-making centres militate against the emergence of the common good

Making EFA the keystone of a social pact for education

5.3 Clarifying the pact for education established at Dakar

At the international level, since the Dakar world forum (April 2000) and the Millennium Declaration (September 2000), the Education For All goals have been unanimously adopted by all countries, forming an essential part of their educational strategies. However, it has been shown that at the national level, the functional integration of these EFA goals has not always been incorporated into a sector policy encompassing all cycles and providers of education, due to the lack of an explicit pact for education. Indeed, **what has been lacking is the capacity to promote these EFA goals as an integrated part of an education public good and of the general interest.**

Recognition of their importance firstly involves protecting these goals until they are achieved, and secondly, following the principles linked to the creation of public benefits for society, the most important of which are completion of the primary cycle and the provision of free access. The benefit of such a pact established upstream would be to **fix one of the parameters of sector negotiation** and enable the system to be adapted to a goal that has been accepted by all and to which resources must then be allocated.

Consequently, **several major principles for the definition of education sector strategies** emerge from this pact for education. In the first place, this involves **the protection of the goals of Universal Primary Education**. Next, there is the importance of **extending lower secondary education**, within the limits of physical and financial expansion, in addition to the parallel **development of the other cycles and branches of education in accordance with the needs of society and the demands of the economy.**

But the importance of the pact for education is not limited to these principles for the definition of strategies; it also contains benefits for the implementation of these policies at both national and international levels.

5.4 The implementation of the Pact for Education at the national level: a public responsibility

The pact for education at the national level sees the Education for All goals as representing a basic social service that is upheld by the authority of the State and accountable to citizens and users.

This is a strict requirement; in practice, however, it leaves room for considerable variations in organisation and running of this basic education service.

5.4.1 Public responsibility and the variety of solutions for the provision of educational services :

Certain forms of state and government predetermine the levels of definition, responsibility and organisation of the education service, the idea being that, without being neutral, these varied forms are neither intrinsically favourable nor unfavourable to the establishment of a basic education service. Thus, with respect to educational coverage as well as the quality of learning, comparing centralized systems with devolved/decentralized systems does not reveal any appreciable differences. This does not mean that devolution or decentralisation are bad ideas (Section 3 states the case for local management, especially by the local communities). Instead, it implies that, on its own, no single solution is enough: everything depends on the concrete arrangements for the implementation of policies, which can be validated by the results that are observed.

Whatever their choices, especially as regards territorial organisation, the Government remains the guarantor of the right to Education For All

Thus, regional organisational structures could be used (federal States or structures created by laws governing to decentralization), leaving federal or central government little responsibility for education. Likewise, rigid modes of organisation or curricular and linguistic choices could benefit from local modifications. **Whether or not the system is federal, decentralized or devolved the equality of access to the basic education service can and should be checked throughout the whole of the territory.** In this way, financing the education service on the basis of local taxes offers considerable advantages with respect to the involvement of the local authorities and community-based management. On the other hand, financing the public education system in this way could result in inequalities based on regional variations in wealth. This brings us back to the need for a mechanism to restore the balance at the national level.

But, leaving aside the legacies and past examples of the development of education systems, is there a method to help make the choices that are most likely to achieve the social pact for education ?

5.4.1.1 A decision-making structure for choosing a system of provision...

Generally speaking, the choice of public service provision modalities can be based on a public or private provider, using a centralized or decentralized system which may or may not be free for the user. For education, this choice may not necessarily be the same for all of the different levels of education. A decision-making structure to assist in making these choices is proposed in the 2004 World Development Report, based on three questions :

- (i) Will society benefit? i.e. is financing a matter for private individuals or the national community? The answer will certainly be very different according to the level of education in question (involving financing by the national, or sometimes international, communities for primary education - which is considered to be of considerable public value - but with an increasing proportion of private finance seen at each successive level of education, in which the logic of individual returns justifies greater investments by the individual students themselves and their families). Once again, it is important that this private financing does not result in the doors to these higher levels of education being closed on the poorest members of society;
- (ii) Can we provide this service in a uniform manner across the whole of the territory? If the answer is yes, the method of delivery can be uniform, if not, decentralized policies will need to be applied and differentiated according to the specific areas and needs;
- (iii) Is the provision of this service easy to evaluate? If the answer is yes, non-public providers (private, community, etc.) could be entrusted with the delivery of this service, as it would be easy to monitor their performance. If not, it would be better to leave it in the hands of the public service, which is better placed to respond to a complex list of requirements, thanks to its ability to react to incentives and direct commands at the same time.

5.4.1.2 ... that is appropriate for the situation and issues relating to education in Africa

In Africa, the implementation of this decision-making structure, and especially the final question, often means that there is a preference **for the public provision of primary education** (the State, or decentralized body, is the provider as well as the sponsor and provider of finance for the service). **In reality, the education service is more difficult to evaluate than other services.** While it is easy to assess whether or not drinking water has been made available in a given area, for example, providing all children with access to a high quality service of primary schooling is a multidimensional goal with a number of different degrees to each dimension. What is more, the service itself involves much more than a

The social pact for education and considerations on the nature of the educational service can legitimate the common choice for public provision of primary education

simple technological choice, incorporating as it does human, social and political dimensions which depend on a policy in the full and complex meaning of the word.

While the preceding arguments tend to show that choosing a public system is consistent with the achievement of the social pact for education at the primary level, this does not exclude the possibility of using a private service or community-based solutions, if only for reasons of educational freedom or as the best way to reach certain groups.

Thus, the preference of African countries for a public education system could simply be seen as the traditional choice, but the clarification of the social pact for education offers a new justification for this choice, which corresponds to the desire to obtain a better basic education service.

As a consequence, while the pact for education has been reaffirmed, particularly by the highest State authorities, the relative erosion of the size and reputation of the public system, as can be seen in a number of countries, is a worrying phenomenon. The damage, however, is reversible, in that it is a consequence of the deterioration of the public service, rather than doubts about social and political choices based on reason.

To breathe new life into this idea of schooling for everyone, it is not just a question of reaffirming the pact for education. It is also important to involve the present and future sponsors, as well as the beneficiaries of the actions, i.e. individual citizens, politicians, users... and those who are currently denied access, in the efforts to transform these ideas into reality.

5.4.2 Ensuring the monitoring of the public education service

Tensions exist structurally **between the universal nature** of the public education service, guaranteed, in general, by the power of the State and the **local provision** of this service (schools must be located where there are children, i.e. everywhere). So long as children are excluded from school, this will be more of a certainty than a possibility. Tension will always be there, but one way to reduce it is to refocus the management structures on the system's ultimate goals (leadership by results, contracts for achieving goals, etc.)

5.4.2.1 An outline for the definition of responsibilities

It is important to define the issue of responsibility, and the World Bank's 2004 World Development Report proposes a practical paradigm, which aims to rethink the provision of educational services in relation to the respective roles of the three key participants in the process: **users, sponsors and service providers**.

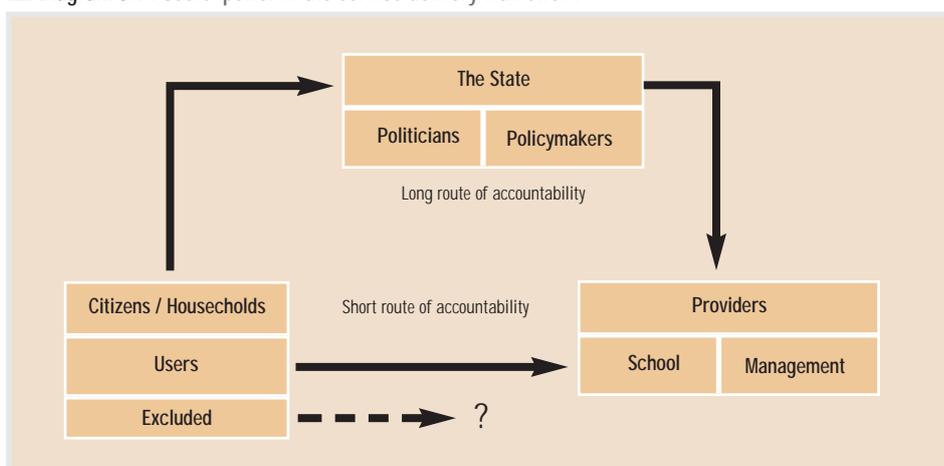
The user, for whom the efficiency of the educational service is of the greatest importance, usually has a «long route» of control over the service provider. Firstly, this extends from the citizen towards the government (sponsor) and then returns to the level of the school establishment via a circuit that varies from pure administrative hierarchies to different forms of contract-based structures.

This long route, while essential for the democratic handling of the major choices of education policy, has little to offer in terms of local control. This is where the «direct route» of local control by the community is important, which today in Africa is considered to be one of the methods that is most likely to give control to the poor (and also the less poor) members of society of the service which is intended for them.

In this outline, the different positions of the sponsor and the service provider can be clearly seen. Sometimes, these positions are obvious, such as when the State is the sponsor and the private or community sector is the service provider. However, it is sometimes appropriate for

the State to be both Sponsor and provider of the service, especially at the primary level. In this case, it is of the utmost importance to make a functional distinction between these two roles, to allow for the impartial evaluation of the service. Without this condition, the «long control» route will be ineffective.

■ Diagram 5.1 : Users' power in the service delivery framework



The operation of the education system requires the definition of a structure of responsibility and accountability between sponsors and service providers

Source: adapted from the World Monitoring Report 2004.

5.4.2.2 Limits to the application of this outline of responsibility in the context of poverty and possible adjustments

a) Limits

One of the flaws of such an outline, when applied to situations of poverty is the exclusion of disadvantaged groups from the two forms of control: control by the citizen, which requires a capacity for social participation that illiteracy and other factors make very difficult, and direct control over the local service, which is hindered by all of the economic, social and cultural barriers that stand between schools and these groups.

Here, once again, reaffirmation of the social pact for education is of paramount importance. Without this pact, schools can actually exacerbate the problem of exclusion, by sanctioning and perpetuating social divisions. On the other hand, schools that make this pact an integral part of their principles and operations provide the ideal way to improve social and economic integration.

b) Adjustments

All institutional and organisational structures are not equal when it comes to promoting these different levels of control and implementing the pact for education. Mention has just been made of the choice between public and private service providers and the need to distinguish between the roles and positions of the different participants in the process. From this point of view, the educational environment is changing: educational establishments, schools in particular, are changing their status to give greater priority to the various members of the

educational community (parents' associations, management committees, etc.) At more integrated levels, groups of users, unions and opinion leaders (politicians and journalists) all have a role to play, for although the start of this debate has been notable for its lack of public discussion, the way forward is not through less debate, but through general support for a social pact for education at the national level and opening up the debate to those who are currently excluded.

However, to inform the debate and control the provision of public education at all levels (using the «long» and «direct» routes shown in the outline), there is a need for relevant information and transparency within the system. This forms the subject of the following paragraph concerning evaluation issues.

5.4.3 Evaluation in support of the implementation of the social pact for education

Organising the provision of the education service and letting citizens and users play a part in its control are consequences of the implementation of a public education service. Thus, it is important to be properly equipped for the management and control of this service by using appropriate procedures and information. This starts at the school level, where the learning actually occurs and extends to the national level, where we find the major goals relating to quantity, quality and equity. The aim is to facilitate evaluation at all levels of the system in order to make management more transparent and promote the implementation of the most effective decisions and practices. In reality, market forces do not apply to the process of creating social benefits from public financing : **State or fully subsidized schools that are failing in their mission do not cease to operate. This necessitates the setting up of evaluation procedures to prevent the perpetuation of situations that involve the denial of education or the waste of resources that could be better used elsewhere.**

The organisation of a genuine national evaluation system is of major concern for national education systems. The following issues needed to be considered when setting up this new organisation :

- Results of the national goals are taking a long time to be transformed into measurable indicators at all levels of the system,
- Structures concerning incentives and responsibility for participants in the educational process are rarely in line with the goals of the system.

These issues do not merely involve the education system and those who manage it. **The idea is for the evaluation policy to be not just a tool for the administration, but also for the citizen.** One commonly stated way to achieve this aim is the establishment of national evaluation units at the political level, which may be independent of the Ministry of Education.

There remains a need for **transparency** concerning the issues and running of education systems. In this way, the social pact for education can be transformed into agreement in favour of strong sector policies where the interest of children comes first.

Information and transparency are strategic for the actual implementation of the social pact for education



