

EQ Review

Educational Quality in the Developing World



EQ Review is a newsletter published by USAID's EQUIPI to share knowledge about issues fundamental to improving educational quality and to communicate the successes, challenges, and lessons learned by USAID Missions.

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Decentralization in Education

Significant K-12 education decentralization efforts are under way in every region of the developing world. The precise design of this policy reform varies by country, but most decentralization initiatives fall into one of two types: 1) the devolution of service delivery responsibilities from national to local or regional governments, and 2) the delegation of many service delivery decisions and functions to the level of the school. Some countries attempt both types of decentralization simultaneously. Under the first, *devolution* to sub-national governments, education is added to those government's other service-delivery responsibilities, and the sub-national government may be partly or entirely responsible for funding education. Under the second, *school autonomy*, a school board or school management committee is usually formed to provide oversight and is made up of elected community representatives in addition to teachers and the school director. Usually, the school director is given new management powers and responsibilities and almost all of the school funding is provided by the government doing the decentralization.

Decentralization moves decision-making closer to the people and may give them greater say in schooling decisions as well as greater ability to hold service providers accountable. Whether it leads to improved education is more debatable. In principle, schools are empowered to determine their own priorities and to develop their own school reforms to improve teaching and learning. In practice, weak management capacity, insufficient funding, inadequately trained teachers, and weak system support make it difficult to realize the positive potential of decentralization. The empirical research evidence on education decentralization is mixed but frequently shows that increasing parental participation in school governance, giving teachers the right to select their own textbooks, and granting school directors the authority to recruit teachers contribute positively to education quality.

In reality, many countries adopt education decentralization

policies for reasons which have little to do with improving schooling; for example, Argentina decentralized education to provincial governments in order to reduce the federal government's fiscal deficit, and Spain decentralized education to regional governments to accommodate the demands of different ethnic/language groups. The challenge facing education ministries and donors is how to implement these policies to facilitate improved service delivery and to avoid some of the dangers which could worsen both the quality and equity of public education.

The implementation of decentralization policies poses numerous challenges. *First*, the design of decentralization as specified in legislation and decrees may create uncertainty as to which level of government or which decision-maker is responsible for what. It's not unusual for decentralization legislation to be in conflict with other existing laws. It's also not unusual for education ministries to continue to tightly regulate the curriculum and determine teacher employment and pay, leaving little room for local control. *Second*, the capacities of school boards to govern schools, or school directors to manage schools, or teachers and others to work collectively to reform the school are often weak and need development. *Third*, system support to the newly decentralized authorities may not exist. Sub-national governments, school boards, and parents may have very little information about their schools' academic and financial performance relative to other jurisdictions or schools. School inspectors or the local offices of the education ministry sometimes lack the culture and capacity to provide guidance and assistance, as opposed to enforcing rules. Teacher in-service education may remain supply-driven by the education ministry, and little training and other support may be given to school directors to better manage and lead. *Finally*, at times decentralization is not accompanied by the increased discretionary funding required for schools to exercise their new responsibilities for self-improvement.

Education development projects are helping address many of these problems, often in creative ways. Training in

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Mali Regional Action Plan/ Decision Making (RAP-DM)

The overall goal of the Mali Regional Action Plan/Decision Making (RAP-DM) Project - a five-year project that began in August 2004 - is to provide technical assistance through capacity-building to the deconcentrated¹ structures of the Ministry of Education (MOE), including Education Academies (AE) and Centers for Pedagogical Animation (CAP). The program aims to shift the delegation of responsibility from the the central to the regional ministry offices. Regional education action plans (PARE) will be developed, planning and management tools improved, information systems reinforced, and complementarities between job skills and position profiles improved.

In an initial situation analysis that was carried out in December 2004, it was noted that there is divergence between national decentralization policy and current education system management practices. This divergence may be attributed to local governments' weak capacity to assume a role in education system management. In many cases, particularly in rural areas, the largely illiterate public does not understand the importance of taking on the management and financing of an education system that, in general, operates outside of their sphere of understanding and influence. Hence, the overall goal of the RAP-DM is to provide technical assistance to the AEs and CAPs to help them better plan and manage activities and offer support to the decentralized government structures.

As part of the decentralization effort, the RAP-DM is integrated into the MOE's ongoing efforts to implement deconcentration and decentralization in accordance with Government of Mali (GRM) policy. As such, the RAP-DM team is based in the MOE building which helps to facilitate the relations with some of the various ministerial entities. The RAP-DM will provide a facility for training regional MOE staff as well as providing continuous monitoring at the AE and CAP levels.

Flexible and innovative training strategies such as hands-on training and just-in-time methodologies will be used. The current training systems are best adapted to the needs of large villages, towns, and cities. However, by using a more innovative system that uses a number of simple planning tools and takes into account the actual needs of the trainees, the RAP-DM hopes to strengthen the AEs so they will be more useful and effective. The RAP-DM will organize annual national-level seminars on: AE Director training; planning and budget training; and evaluation of progress.

Finally, the RAP-DM will assist the MOE in establishing a regional education fund to encourage AEs to develop quality action plans that are based on relevant statistical data and are well monitored. The fund will also provide additional resources to AEs to support the implementation of particular activities in the education action plan that aim to improve educational quality at the primary school level.

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¹ In the context of education in Mali, the term "deconcentration" is the devolution of decision making power, and human and financial resources to the regional and district level MOE's operation units. "Decentralization" is the transfer of competencies and means (financial and human resources) from central MOE to the regional and communal elected bodies so that they can fully implement their roles and responsibilities - as defined by law - in the education sector.

Children's Learning Access Sustained in Senegal (CLASS)



Students in a CLASS school in Senegal

The Children's Learning Access Sustained in Senegal project (CLASS) is a five-year USAID funded activity aimed at increasing access to and improving the quality of middle school education in Senegal. It is an integrated set of support activities that addresses system constraints that affect quality middle school education at the central, regional, school, and community levels in three target regions of Senegal. A separate teacher education component (SITT) was added to the project to strengthen the national in-service teacher training system in all regions of Senegal.

A main goal of the CLASS project is to improve decentralization and community management. This will be achieved by strengthening decentralization procedures at the regional and district levels and strengthening the capacity of the project's targeted schools and communities to plan and implement school improvement activities that

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affect education quality. Specific activities include:

- Strengthening the capacity of regional and departmental entities in three regions to support schools in improving educational quality.
- Training school management committees (SMCs) to become active and effective in their regions.
- Training targeted middle schools in the regions to develop, implement, and refine school development plans.

As of the end of the project's second year in August 2005, CLASS had achieved several major decentralization objectives:

- Strategy workshops mobilized regional local units around topics of local education financing, partnership building with the Ministry of Education's Directorate for Middle School Education, and operational diagnoses of the communities.
- 20 SMC trainers in targeted regions were trained in conflict resolution and preventive maintenance.
- CLASS produced resources needed for supporting SMCs in the development of school improvement plans, including a new training module and analysis and review of project materials and key documents.

For more information, please contact USAID/Senegal CTO Pape Sow at psow@usaid.gov.

APRENDES: Innovative Education Practices in Rural Peru

Since 2003 the Innovations in Decentralization and Active Schools (ApreNDes) project has supported the Peruvian government through assistance for the 2003 Education Law and its focus on decentralization, local management, improved education quality, and democratic practices in the schools and school communities in rural areas of the San Martín region. USAID/Perú and the Ministry of Education are project partners, while the Academy for Educational Development is in charge of implementation.

ApreNDes focuses on the design of effective decentralization policies and the implementation of these policies through local management of quality education in the regional and local context, focusing on learning,

leadership and democratic behavior. The project promotes work in groups, self initiated learning, democratic behavior and parent participation in the school, in such a way that the students become constructive participants in the democratic process and involved in the social and economic life of their communities. At the same time the project strengthens the capacity of several levels of educational actors, such as the Ministry of Education, local government and others, so that they may support the schools and assume appropriate roles in the decentralization process.

The project works in 140 schools, reaching more than 6,600 students, strengthening one-teacher and multi-grade schools. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator of the learning process. Project Facilitators train the teachers, give technical assistance and promote the development of learning materials. In preparation for the regulations of the Decentralization Law the management of the school is in the hands of the Educational Council (students, parents, school directors and community leaders) that develop the school plan.

By combining active learning in the classroom, improved local management, and decentralization activities and at the national, regional, local and school level the project aims to improve the quality of rural education from the bottom up as well as the top down.

For more information, please contact ApreNDes CTO Eurydice Rorick at erorick@usaid.gov or visit the ApreNDes website at <http://www.aprendesperu.org/>.



Children in an APRENDES classroom in San Martin, Peru

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Egypt and Namibia Projects Participate in a Decentralization Workshop

In an effort to assist ministries of education and government officials improve the design and implementation of decentralization and effect better sector performance, a workshop on “The Implementation of Education Decentralization: A Three Day Workshop for National and Sub-National Stakeholders” was developed. In collaboration with programmatic partner Research Triangle Institute (RTI), Academy for Educational Development (AED) Senior Global Education Development Specialist Joe Cohen conducted education decentralization workshops with two EQUIP2 Associate Awards in Spring 2005: the Egypt Education Reform Project (ERP) in March and the Namibia Basic Education Support Project, Phase 3 (BES 3) in May. The workshop’s primary objectives were to:

- Share a common vision of the education sector’s decentralization objectives;
- Facilitate understanding of the link between decentralization and the quality of teaching and learning;
- Communicate lessons learned from international experience with decentralization;
- Explain the complexity and detail required to design and implement decentralization;
- Identify the principal constraints to implementation of education decentralization; and
- Set priorities for moving forward.

In Egypt and Namibia, participants included regional and national representatives from the Ministries of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Local Administration, and the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development, as well as education officials from the regional governments. Since the status of decentralization is unique to each country, the workshop is customized to the specific context. Topics addressed included examining progress thus far, facing challenges, developing a concrete action plan and timeline for moving forward, ensuring accountability, financing decentralized schools, and identifying the country’s specific legal and institutional framework.

The workshops provided a forum for various stakeholder groups to build consensus on the importance and

achievements of education decentralization and engage in a collegial policy dialogue. The experience in Egypt and Namibia will help EQUIP2 further refine its decentralization tools for presentations in Guatemala, Georgia, and Senegal over the coming year.

For questions about Egypt ERP, contact CTO Hala El Sarafy at helserafy@usaid.gov. For questions about Namibia’s BES 3, contact CTO Martin Tjituka at mtjituka@usaid.gov. Please also visit <http://www.equip123.net/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=285&z=92> for more information.

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preparing school improvement plans, accompanied by funding of those plans, provides a powerful stimulus for school communities to work collectively to define their own priorities and to own their own school reform. Training school boards and creating new information systems [e.g., school report cards] oriented towards parents rather than planners provides a basis for improved accountability. Funding school grants for specific purposes—textbooks, teacher training, school renovation—gives schools experience in managing funds and empowers school boards while addressing real problems in service delivery. Establishing and funding realistic minimum standards of service provision reduces inequalities and helps ensure decentralization does not leave the poor behind.

Decentralization is not a magical solution to the real problems facing K-12 education in poor countries, but the introduction of decentralization policies provides an opportunity for change to improve schooling.

For more information, please contact EQUIP2 representative Donald Winkler, Senior Research Economist, International Development Group, Research Triangle Institute, at dwickler@rti.org.

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