

Research paper

Problems behind Education for All (EFA): The case of Sierra Leone

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Contextualisation

Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the world, experienced an 11-year civil war until 2002, and has been in the process of rebuilding the nation, including the education sector. Sierra Leone's net enrolment ratio in primary education dropped to 41 per cent after the war (UNICEF, 2005). This is largely related to widespread poverty; about 70 per cent of the population lives in poverty with more than two-thirds of the people categorised as being in extreme poverty (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005). The government, with about half of the national budget donor funded, has made a strong commitment to achieving compulsory basic education, along with the international goal of Education for All (EFA). This is not only because having an education is one of the basic human rights, but also because education can be one potential way to tackle poverty. Therefore, the government has had educational reforms, including the introduction of a free primary education policy and this has resulted in a rapid increase in the net enrolment ratio of primary education to 63.8 per cent. However, behind the rapid progress in terms of access to primary education, there are still more than 30 per cent of children who are not in school and primary completion rates are below 60 per cent nationally (MEST, 2007).

Abstract. *This paper discusses Sierra Leone's commitment to EFA and the possibility of unintended consequences if its success is measured only by results showing quantitative gains while downplaying the decline in the quality of the education offered. Equal access to quality education is an integral part of EFA. With donors' assistance, the government has made a strong commitment to achieve the international goal of EFA. A free primary education policy introduced in 2000 has led to rapid progress in terms of access to schooling. However, fieldwork research based on observation of schools, interviews with teachers, and questionnaires from pupils, parents and teachers in 27 schools in five towns, shows that the quality of the education provided has been compromised due to the rapid increase in the number of enrolled children; a high teacher-pupil ratio, a shortage of teaching and learning materials, school buildings and furniture, and low motivation on the part of teachers are quite common. This paper also argues for the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in supplementing government efforts to expand educational access of acceptable quality, especially when the government's capacity to deliver education is weak.*

Introduction

Education contributes to the improvement of social equality, health, participation in the economic sector and democracy (Hannum and Buchmann, 2005). The international community has placed education, especially primary education, at the top of the international development agenda, urging donor countries to give external financial assistance and aid recipient countries in encouraging more budget spending on education. The World Conference on EFA in Jomtien in 1990, the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, and the United Nations (UN) Millennium Summit in New York in 2000 were major conferences where the importance of Universal Primary Education (UPE) was discussed. It was at these conferences where the international community agreed to achieve the goal. Since the World Education Forum in Dakar, a wider participation in the goal to achieve EFA by 2015 has been strengthened, with an emphasis on the importance of civil society participation in

planning, implementation, and monitoring. Aid allocation not only goes to governments, but also to NGOs and charity groups who work more closely with and for beneficiaries. This is because, currently, EFA is “everybody’s business” (Rao and Smyth, 2005).

Since 1990, when the international community showed their commitment to achieving EFA through the Jomtien conference, as a member of the international community, the government of Sierra Leone, together with donors, has been working for the development of education. Sierra Leone implemented the UPE scheme in late 1993. The government also introduced a policy of free education at the primary education level in 2000. Under this policy, the government began paying tuition fees and providing teaching and learning materials and core textbooks to all children, and since 2001, they have borne the responsibility of the National Primary School Education (NPSE) fee. Furthermore, the government set a fine of up to Le500,000, imprisonment, or both for a parent or a guardian who does not send their child to school. These resulted in an increase in the net enrolment ratio of primary education to 63.0 per cent in 2004 (MEST, 2007). However, there are still over 30 per cent of children who do not have access to school. In addition, the completion rate of primary education is still below 60.0 percent nationally (63.9% for boys and 47.6% for girls). This indicates that the government’s ability to deliver educational services to all children is not adequate and there are still problems with regular access to primary school and the quality of education provided. Furthermore, in Sierra Leone, about 70 per cent of the population lives in poverty with more than two-thirds of the people categorised as being in extreme poverty (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005). Poverty has been worsened by the conflicts that occurred from 1991 to 2002. The decade of war resulted in 20,000 deaths, over two million displacements, and thousands injured or maimed through human rights abuses. The social, economic and physical facilities were vandalised. The government has also been impoverished and has been largely dependent on donors: about half of the government’s budget is donor-funded (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005). While the government’s ability to provide educational service remains weak, NGOs have greatly contributed to an improvement in the access to primary education with more acceptable quality in supplementing government efforts in the goal of EFA. However, it should be pointed out that in order to meet the goal of EFA, outcomes that can be shown as indicators, such as enrolment, tend to garner more attention. Yet, what should not be missed is the primary importance of education. Quality education is an integral part of EFA. Therefore, this paper will firstly outline the connection between poverty reduction and education. Secondly, quality education will be discussed, and thirdly, the methodology used in this study will be explained. Then, this paper will discuss the case of Sierra Leone based on the author’s field research findings to examine the quality of education provided in Sierra Leone and the role of NGOs in the supplementary work of the government in making progress to meet EFA. In conclusion, this paper will focus on recommendations for the improvement of the current problematic situation to policy makers.

Poverty Reduction and Education

Considering the fact that about 70 per cent of the population lives in poverty in Sierra Leone (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005), there is a genuine need for the eradication of poverty and education can be one means of doing so. This is because there is a connection between economic growth and human development (Oketch, 2006). Education plays a significant role in a process of improvement of income and living standards through obtaining knowledge and technology. Economic growth can provide resources for improvement in human development, while improvements in human development contribute to economic development. Furthermore, in a number of studies, increased earnings have a link to additional years of education. An improved environment for education is also likely to support higher rates of growth, as low-income people are able to seek better economic opportunities (Ranis *et al*, 2000). That is, education can help people become more productive and earn more through strengthening their human capital, such as skills, techniques, and abilities. Moreover, households with at least a primary education had a higher probability of getting

out of, and a lower probability of falling into, poverty (Gigsten *et al*, 2003). In addition, Silue (2000) argues that development issues in Africa not only rest with economic problems but also through the lack of good governance, lack of democracy and weak political institutions that have been maintained because the vast majority of the population are illiterate and do not participate in the development process. In order to meet the gap between the elite and the majority of the rest, education should be accessible to all. Education contributes to improvements in living standards and quality of life and creates essential opportunities. Therefore, education is a crucial human development goal in its own right and an essential tool for the empowerment of the poor. The government of Sierra Leone also understands this significant role of education in poverty reduction. Sierra Leone's full Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was adopted in 2005. The government has developed and implemented the PRSP with a view to making progress regarding the international targets set out in EFA and MDGs and has stressed the need for this work to be conducted in a participatory manner that encourages the involvement of civil society including NGOs (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005).

Quality Education

Providing quality education is one of the six goals in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). There are linkages between educational quality and national economic productivity (Hanushek, 2000). Wolff (2006 in ADEA, UIE and GTZ) identifies the four components of a quality education as follows; '(a) appropriate medium of instruction (in mono- or multimedia systems); (b) culturally adequate curricular content; (c) professionally applied teaching methods; and (d) adequate financial and material resources'. Adequate curriculum reforms, teaching methods and secured funding are also important. These are because the role of schools is not only to provide skills for reading, writing and arithmetic. Wolff (2006 in ADEA *et al*) also argues that 'pupils need to be educated to become independent and critical thinkers'. Furthermore, although children should be at the centre of obtaining a quality education, there is the 'adaptation of children to schools' rather than the 'adaptation of schools to children' (the MLA Project, 2000). When this is the case, the education provided could be far from good quality.

One such adaptation can be seen in language policies in education. Silue (2000) argues that almost all African nations use a foreign language as the medium of instruction. In many African countries, they use the home language for the first two or three years of schooling and then transition into instruction that uses the dominant language – the former colonial master's language. However, Heugh (2006 in ADEA *et al*) argues that learners need six to eight years to learn a second language sufficiently enough to use it as a medium of instruction. Bgoya (2001) discusses that if students are forced to use a foreign language artificially, they may fail to be proficient in their own language as well as in the foreign language, thus becoming 'twice disadvantaged'. The MLA Project (2000) points out the positive aspects of using the home language as the medium of instruction, arguing that their 'learning is reinforced directly' at school and also at home through interaction with family members. Furthermore, the use of an unfamiliar language as a medium of instruction leads to 'traditional and teacher-centred teaching methods' that include teachers doing most of the talking while children remain silent or passive participants (Alidou and Broke-Utne, 2006 in ADEA *et al*).

The quality of education also depends on the quality of teachers. The MLA Project (2000) lists age, gender, qualifications, experience and language of the teaching force as characteristics that directly and indirectly influence children's learning performances. Hanushek (2000) argues that improving teacher quality is an important key in improving student performance. He argues that the quality of a school could be influenced by class size, teacher experience, and teachers' salaries. The support teachers receive through a process of evaluations, supervision and feedback, also affects the quality of teaching, and it

contributes to ensuring proper accountability in teaching. Furthermore, considering that teachers are a 'valuable national resource', training them is a 'significant social investment'. Moreover, providing sufficient basic furniture, enabling the physical environment to facilitate teaching and learning, and providing teaching and learning materials is a 'minimum condition for enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process'. In-service training, libraries, and teacher resource centres are also important and useful facilities in improving teachers' classroom performance (The MLA Project, 2000).

A children's home environment is also important in securing support for their schoolwork. The MLA Project (2000) points out that the 'quality of education requires the strong support from the home of the learners', and a parent's education level is a decisive factor affecting their children's performance. This is because parents with higher education levels encourage their children's education psychologically and are academically able to support their children's study. Furthermore, adequate food intake greatly influences the learner's capacity for concentration and learning. Travel time to school is another aspect to examine that increases a learners' burden. Although parents tend to overlook the importance of learning support at home, children need parental support and care in their education. Furthermore, Hanushek (2000) points out that 'students respond to school' in terms of the quality of education they have. It is very serious if children choose to drop out of school due to inadequate quality of education. Having a good quality of education can contribute to poverty reduction through improving economic sectors, health, empowerment and democracy. In other words, if the education offered is not of good quality, the children's schooling cannot be meaningful with positive outcomes. Therefore, primary education needs to deliver a higher quality of education.

Methodology

In this paper, the components of quality education discussed above will be a framework in examining the impact of EFA in primary education provided in Sierra Leone. To be more specific, this study takes a critical stance regarding the tendency to focus on enrolment rates that can be seen in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Annual Progress Report, which stated that their set target of increase in primary net enrolment was 70 percent by the end of 2006 (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2006). This paper argues that the commitment to EFA and UPE could lead to the decline in the quality of education provided being downplayed in Sierra Leone, if quantitative aspects, such as enrolment rates, become the focus of too much attention. In terms of methodology, this research involves a literature review, an observation of schools, interviewing teachers, government officials and NGO staff, and distributing questionnaires to teachers, parents, and pupils. The fieldwork was undertaken from April to July 2005. The participants included 125 teachers, 454 parents, and 488 pupils from 27 primary schools in five towns, including Freetown, Bo, Moyamba, Kenema and Makeni. Statistics show that the ratios of poverty to the population in those districts are: Western urban (15.0 percent), Bo (64.0 percent), Moyamba (68.0 percent), Kenema (88.0 percent) and Bombali (89.0 percent) (the Government of Sierra Leone, 2005). To reduce geographical bias, towns in the east, west, south, and north of Sierra Leone were chosen. As Sierra Leone's education has been largely influenced by the history of British colonialism and Islamic expansion through trade, about 80 per cent of schools are faith-based, either Christian or Islamic. Therefore, eleven Christian schools and ten Islamic schools were chosen as samples, as well as five municipal schools and one private school. The demographics for my samples are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics for the study samples

Variable	Categories	N	Percentage
Schools' faith	Christian	11	40.7
	Islamic	10	37.0
	Municipal	5	18.5
	Private	1	3.7
Teachers' Gender	Male	63	50.4
	Female	62	49.6
Teachers' Religion	Christian	75	60.0
	Muslim	50	40.0
Parental Status	Father	284	62.6
	Mother	147	32.4
	Other	22	4.8
	No Answer	1	0.2
Parents' Religion	Christian	242	53.3
	Muslim	207	45.6
	Other	1	0.2
	No Answer	4	0.9
Pupils' Gender	Male	264	54.1
	Female	224	45.9
Pupils' Religion	Christian	152	31.2
	Muslim	336	68.8

In terms of NGOs, an international NGO, Plan Sierra Leone (which has provided the largest support for education renewal in Sierra Leone outside the World Bank, African Bank and UNICEF) was the main participant. They have partnership with local NGOs and have worked for Sierra Leone's education renewal. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that some of the findings related to schools in Moyamba could deserve special attention as a unique case since the sample schools in Moyamba were all supported by Plan Sierra Leone and their partner local NGOs. This is because Plan Sierra Leone selected Moyamba as their model district and has assisted most primary schools there (over 400 primary schools as of May 2005).

As pointed out earlier, often policy makers tend to be in favour of a statistical approach with benchmarks. The author does not deny the importance of the use of benchmark and statistical approach. However, this paper tries to move beyond and reflect the voices of my participants to achieve deeper levels of knowledge and understanding and the views of the participants, and of primary education in Sierra Leone. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis were taken. While quantitative or statistical data would provide simple and explicit outcomes within given choices, the use of qualitative data is useful to supplement, validate and explain quantitative data. To gain insight into the knowledge of my participants and the understanding of the background of primary education in Sierra Leone, the data gathered were processed in the following way: 1) Diagrams and charts were made to organise and examine components of quantitative data from questionnaires; 2) All the interviews were transcribed. The printed transcripts were read through and irrelevant data were excluded. The relevant data were coded manually according to categorisations which were made based on the question and themes to be examined. During this process, the interpretation of qualitative data was done carefully as it is 'making cultural inferences' according to Spradly (1980); 3) Coded data were then re-examined, sorted, categorised, evaluated, compared and synthesised; and 4) The author examined the data to identify any patterns or if there are any emergent findings.

The Case of Sierra Leone

This section examines primary education in Sierra Leone using a framework of quality education discussed earlier. Teacher-pupil ratio is often one indicator in measuring the quality of education, and the government sets the recommended ratio at 1:40. However, as shown in Table 2, my field research reveals that only 8.8 per cent of classes met this ratio. That is, in more than 90 per cent of the sample the government's recommended teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 was not met.

Table 2. Teacher-pupil ratio by regions with percentages in parentheses (Teachers N = 125)

Ratio	Freetown	Bo	Moyamba	Kenema	Makeni	Total
<40	2 (7.4)	4 ¹ (13.3)	4 (19.0)	0 (0)	1 (5.0)	11 ¹ (8.8)
41-60	14 (51.9)	20 (66.7)	12 (57.1)	1 (3.7)	7 (35.0)	54 (43.2)
61-80	10 (37.0)	5 (16.7)	3 (14.3)	7 (25.9)	3 (15.0)	28 (22.4)
81-100	0 (0)	1 (3.3)	0 (0)	5 (18.5)	1 (5.0)	7 (5.6)
101+	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	14 (51.9)	7 (35.0)	21 (16.8)
N/A	1 (3.7)	0	2 (9.5)	0	1 (5.0)	4 (3.2)
Total	27	30	21	27	20	125
Percentage poverty in the district	15	64	68	88	89	70

Source: Author's field data for teacher-pupil ratio and the Sierra Leone government resource for ratio of poverty in districts. ¹ private = 4

The teacher-pupil ratios of over 100:1 were all from schools in Kenema and Makeni, where the level of poverty is more severe and where rehabilitation from the civil war is often slower, as the damage was more devastating. On the contrary, in Moyamba, which was appointed as a model district by an international NGO, Plan Sierra Leone (which has supported most primary schools with their local partner NGOs), the majority of classes had less than 60 pupils per teacher. This does not meet the government's recommended ratio of 1:40; however, it could still be said that this is a relatively good ratio, compared to the samples in other areas. Freetown is the capital of Sierra Leone and Bo is the second biggest town, which means that they have a relatively better infrastructure and often attract more aid agencies than other areas. Bearing these factors in mind, teacher-pupil ratios in Moyamba support Plan Sierra Leone's dynamic work of constructing and rehabilitating school buildings.

In fact, Plan Sierra Leone has greatly contributed to education renewal in Sierra Leone. Their work includes; 1) Construction and rehabilitation of primary schools including toilets and wells; 2) Providing school furniture; 3) Training teachers through workshops, as some are not trained and qualified; 4) Supporting unqualified teachers who cannot move out to a college through distance learning; 5) Providing refresher courses for qualified teachers; 6) Distributing school materials including pens, pencils, teaching and learning materials, record books, registers and chalk, to help schools operate properly; 7) Providing recreational kits to the war-traumatised children, such as footballs, volleyballs, handballs, skipping ropes, and games; 8) Promoting peace education; 9) Supporting local NGOs that share common goals with Plan Sierra Leone, such as a child-focused approach; 10) Building capacity of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)'s district offices; and 11) Supporting the revision and printing of primary school syllabi.

Therefore, although in Sierra Leone, double-shifts at schools are very common to reduce severe congestion in classrooms, surprisingly, there was no double-shift school at all in Moyamba due to Plan Sierra Leone's contribution in constructing and rehabilitating school buildings. The problem of the double-shift school is that for the use of two schools in the morning and afternoon shifts, it is very difficult to secure enough time to teach and learn.

Teachers pointed out that 'there is not enough time to teach all subjects in the syllabus effectively'. Thus, it could be said that the double-shift school, which was introduced to help relieve a shortage of school buildings, is an "adaptation to school" that children and teachers have to accept. Moreover, although schools in Moyamba are exceptions as Plan Sierra Leone has supported the provision of teaching and learning materials, recreation kits and workshops for teachers, many children in other areas did not have a set of textbooks. Teachers did not even have their own teaching materials, and school textbooks for teachers were usually kept in a locked drawer to prevent them from being lost or stolen. Many teachers pointed out that overcrowded classrooms were one of their difficulties in providing a good quality education. That is, the introduction of the free primary education policy did not come with adequate school buildings and teaching and learning materials, and brought about an increase in teachers' workloads for the increased number of children. Teachers felt it was very hard to control classes and to provide sound learning in such an environment.

Moreover, the double-shift system is convenient in allowing teachers to engage in their secondary job, since the necessity of earning a living is a pressing issue for teachers. However, this is related to teachers' lower motivation and commitment to their teaching. Behind these factors are low and delayed salaries of teachers. In my sample, 120 teachers (96.0%) were not satisfied with their salary. It is noteworthy that 96.8 per cent of my participants had qualification(s) of Teachers Certificate, Higher Teachers Certificate and/or Diploma, and their teaching experience and salary ranges are shown in the Table 3 and 4.

Table 3. Teachers' years of teaching experience with percentages in parentheses (Teachers N = 125)

	< 1	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20+	N/A
N	2 (1.6)	19 (15.2)	21 (16.8)	12 (9.6)	21 (16.8)	49 (39.2)	1 (0.8)

Source: Author's field research

Table 4. Teachers' monthly salaries in thousands of Le¹ with percentages in parentheses (Teachers N = 125)

	Unpaid	<100	100 to 149	150 to 199	200 to 249	250+	N/A
N	6 (4.8)	5 (4.0)	25 (20.0)	58 (46.4)	11 (8.8)	9 (7.2)	11 (8.8)

Source: Author's field research

As can be seen above, although more than 80 per cent of the teachers in the sample have five or more years of experience (which indicates an experienced teaching force), their salaries are poor. Furthermore, all teachers, except those working for a private school, said their salaries are delayed about 30 days. Some newly recruited teachers worked unpaid for a period of months to even two to three years in extreme cases until they got on the payroll. One comment expressed that 'There is no difference in salary between I, who have worked for over 20 years and a teacher who has only worked for 5 years. As long as you have the same qualification, you have the same salary which to me is not right. It dampens the spirits of teachers'. Many teachers thought that their salaries did not match their experience and qualifications. Because of their low and delayed payment, some spent their time in secondary jobs, which varied from farming, livestock breeding, petty trading, to private tutor work. A teacher expressed his concerns that 'Salary delays always. There is a continuous devaluation of the currency. Prices of essential commodities are very high. So many mouths to feed at home. Rent, light-bill, and water rate continue to rise at an alarming rate'. Some teachers said that they could not concentrate on their teaching during classes because they were thinking about how to maintain their household. In this study, 63 teachers (50.4%) had secondary jobs to meet their needs. This need for secondary jobs detaches teachers from having a higher motivation and a stronger commitment to their work and pupils; it also

lessens the feelings of pride in their profession, which affects the quality of education they provide.

In addition to the shortage of school buildings and teaching and learning materials, the school environment of most sample schools had severe problems with infrastructure, security, facilities and equipment. Except for a private school in Bo, most schools did not have a library, science laboratory or even a proper playground. Many teachers confessed their concerns about school safety and wanted the school compound surrounded by a wall or fence so that strangers could not enter the compound during and after school hours, as well as stopping some pupils sneaking away from classes. Teachers also wanted an assembly hall, a staff room, toilets, and water well facilities. Considering some pupils' low level of concentration in classes, a feeding program would also encourage children's regular schooling and enhance their concentration. Overall, all primary schools (except for a private one) in my sample, had many difficulties in meeting the minimal conditions that schools need to provide for quality education, which were discussed in the earlier section.

Regarding the home environment, many teachers lamented the lack of parental care towards the children's education. Teachers said that 'because of poverty, parents need their children to help farm to produce food or do other work rather than sending them to school', and 'poverty and proper parental care need to be improved. Some pupils do not have a bag, shoes or even food to eat before coming to class. You find them often sleeping in class'. In my study, 298 (61.1%) children took less than 30 minutes to travel to school, 162 (33.2%) children took between 30 minutes to an hour, and 26 (5.3%) children took more than one hour to travel to school. In Sierra Leone, during the dry season, it is very hot and humid, while during the rainy season, the rain is literally a downpour. Still, infrastructure is not good enough in many areas except the capital Freetown. There is no reasonably priced transport to take children to and from school in those areas. Thus, they must walk. Children's schooling contains issues of safety and health. Once children become ill, there is another problem of recovery as access to clinics is limited in terms of both proximity and financial cost for the majority of the population in Sierra Leone. Therefore, children need sound parental care with good understanding and support for their nutrition, health and education.

Concerning issues of language in education, in Sierra Leone, vernacular languages are the medium of instruction for Classes one to three, and from Class four, English is used. Although the official language is English, there are 23 vernacular languages spoken. Among them, four languages – Krio, Limba, Mende and Themne – have been promoted to National Language status and they are also the languages of wider communication (Francis and Kamanda, 2001). However, in relation to parental care and support of children's studies at home, in my study, 365 (80.5%) parents' first language was one of the four National Languages, i.e. not English. Considering this, it could be argued that it would not be realistic for parents to help their children in their studies, as they are conducted in English.

Furthermore, although a lack of adequate parental care and home environment for children's learning is discussed, in this study there were many parents who displayed a relatively high level of understanding and expectation in the value of education and their children's future. With the introduction of a free education policy, significant costs have been taken over by the government in collaboration with donors, but there are still considerable costs borne by parents and education is not entirely free. Schools collect "school fees" from parents on an individual basis to run their schools. This is because the government does not have adequate financial capacity to deliver enough subsidies, materials, infrastructure, salaries, and so on. The government provides school subsidies of Le2,000 (approx. 40 British pence) per pupil per term. However, this is not enough for schools to run on so the government's weak capacity in providing education puts a burden on parents to buy school materials as well as producing a poor learning environment. MEST (2007) recognises that this household contribution accounts for nearly 50 percent at the primary education level, while domestic

public funding represents 35 per cent of total spending on education and donor contributions are about 22 per cent. Considering that 70 per cent of the population lives in poverty in Sierra Leone, “school fees” are a heavy burden for parents, especially since most of them have more than one child in their household. Therefore, parents are working very hard to send their children to school due to “school fees,” and for the lost labour force during children’s school hours; children also spent a lot of time helping their family before or after class. Because of the widespread poverty in Sierra Leone, having a good home environment to assist education is not as simple as stated. Some parents pointed out that the lower quality of education could lead to an increase in drop-out rates because time and money spent on schooling is not worthwhile. This is a “rational decision” for them. All except only three pupils in the sample hoped to go to junior secondary school after primary education. Yet, some added ‘if my parents can afford it’. Primary education is the foundation of education, and therefore it needs to be improved in terms of both quality and quantity to be a bridge to secondary education. In order for parents not to use lower quality of education as an excuse for not sending their children to schools, and for all children to have an education, quality should not suffer.

Concluding Remarks

The EFA means not only having access to schooling but also having quality of education for all children. Since 1990, when the international community showed their commitment to achieving EFA through the Jomtien conference, the Sierra Leone government has had educational reforms including implementation of the UPE scheme and the introduction of a policy for free primary education with a great deal of effort and work from NGOs too. These efforts have brought some positive outcomes in terms of increased access to primary education. However, a lot more must be done in order to ensure that all children in Sierra Leone have equal access to sound quality primary education. Otherwise, pupils’ schooling cannot link to a positive development in themselves and also in the nation as a whole. Constructing and rehabilitating more schools helps decrease the shortage of school buildings and reduce the double-shift system, as well as create more employment opportunities for teachers. Looking at schools in Moyamba, which Plan Sierra Leone appointed as a model district, it is clear that NGOs can help and contribute to these aspects greatly. Plan Sierra Leone’s work not only includes their dynamic school construction and rehabilitation, but also extends to areas that the government usually controls, such as provision of school materials and workshops for teachers, building capacity of government district offices and so on. These show that Plan Sierra Leone is clearly supplementing the government’s role in providing education services and making progress in achieving EFA.

To make further progress, all stakeholders must recognise again that the quality of education is an integral part of EFA. Simple schooling without quality of education does not produce positive outcomes. Policy makers must realise that if schools cannot offer a good quality education, parents will not be willing to send their children to school. This is because, due to widespread poverty, parents make sacrifices in their daily lives for their children’s education. Educating children is a significant investment for not only parents, but also for the nation. Therefore, policy makers need to be seriously concerned about not only achieving the EFA goal in terms of enrolment, but also tackling the issues discussed in this paper to meet the quality of EFA. For this, the following are suggested: 1. Donors and the Sierra Leone government must pay more attention to the quality of education and donors should further encourage the government to invest more in education; 2. The international community should put pressure on the government to ban schools from collecting “school fees”; 3. The government should reconsider teachers’ working conditions so that teachers can concentrate on their jobs with higher motivation and pride; 4. Donors and the government need to further strengthen links with and support for NGOs, as they can work more practically, efficiently, and effectively in areas such as school construction, materials supply, and in-service training courses for teachers, especially when the government capacity to provide education is weak.

Comments/Suggestions

I would welcome and highly appreciate any comments and suggestions on my work.

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