

The debate on whether education is a key variable in the development of nations was settled way back in the 1960s and, since then, the world has traveled from Jomtien (1990) to Dakar (2000) and to many other such sub-regional conferences, seminars and meetings to shape and reshape frameworks and strategies, and to develop tools towards one goal – education for all. Targets have been set, data has been collected and analysed, national and regional plans have been developed and, in some cases, implemented, and status reports have been compiled. But, just how feasible and achievable is Education for All (EFA) in a region such as Southern Africa – with its political, socio-economic and cultural realities, and how has the region fared in its commitment to these goals?

This was the agenda of a Southern Africa conference convened by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and World Education, in February of this year and attended by around 100 representatives of governments, civil society organizations, donors, academics and others from the region and beyond. Stakeholders in the education sector converged in Johannesburg to deal with precisely these issues; taking stock of progress, identifying the bottlenecks and proposing possible remedies towards achievement of the goal. This Issue of *OPENSOURCE* highlights the key issues, as one chronologically moves up the education ladder, before exploring opportunities and trends in sectors such as ICT, and highlighting current developments within OSISA.

Most participants at Johannesburg agreed that there is a major problem with both the space being made available for various actors and the pace at which our region is pursuing the EFA goal in most of our countries. Many doubted that half the countries in Southern Africa, or on the continent for that matter, had made enough progress to give analysts reason to list them among those that would pass the mark come 2015. However, for the more optimistic ones, while challenges do exist, opportunities to make things right are also there.

If any of the presentations made at the Johannesburg conference, (and Madame Gracá Machel's thoughts on some of these issues, as expressed in her conversation with Ezra Mbogori in this Issue), are yardsticks of prospects for EFA achievement, then we still have a long way to go. Each of the EFA goals that was put up for review seemed to be still far from the mark in most countries. Participants noted that significant gains had been made in the past, especially through the policies of the early 1960s which created the framework for the provision of universal pri-

mary education (UPE) and the expansion of post-basic education. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, there was rapid expansion of enrolments at all levels, with plentiful resources available to support such expansion. However, the late 1980s saw a gradual stagnation and, in some cases, a decline in resources for education, presenting a real threat to the gains that had been realized. In actual fact, the ideals of UPE that had been articulated by almost all independent nations became more and more elusive.

Part of the problem has been sheer bad governance in our region, as Tawanda Mutasah's analysis reveals in *Good Governance: The Bedrock of Achieving EFA*. Evidence shows that corruption, misuse of resources and general lack of accountability have led to poor delivery in the education sector in most countries. There is a general lack of appreciation of and respect for the right to education as a core right that will give people the means and knowledge to contribute to democratic processes that shape and affect their lives. Even in countries where resources are relatively available, poor planning has resulted in the misuse and abuse of the resources; where most of the education budget is spent on salaries and equipping bureaucrats with "4x4s" instead of buying books and other materials that directly benefit the children. And yet, as Mutasah decries, concern with governance and its impact on education only started to creep into education discourse as late as Jomtien and only crystallized on the agenda for action arising from Dakar in 2000.

In other cases it has been lack of appreciation of good policy frameworks, as revealed in Saul Murimba's *Policy Review*. Murimba argues that many countries have policies that show intent, but the challenge has been translating these into practice. One example cited is that of Malawi, where the government maintained a policy of open, but not compulsory access to primary education, the implementation of which was hampered by other requirements such as school fees, uniforms and many others that parents were expected to meet. Policy documents have not spoken to the reality on the ground in most countries, hence the gaps between policy and practice, as illustrated by Saul Murimba. In yet other cases, misguided policy choices have also contributed to the poor performance in education delivery, where models have been borrowed out of context, with disastrous results, as proved by Jennifer Roberts' article on *Outcomes-based Education: Lessons for the Region*.

It was also apparent at Johannesburg that the region, like the rest of the continent, is still grappling with issues of quality, access and the gender dimensions thereof, at all levels, as articulated clearly by Madame Gracá Machel. But, even before one makes a case for quality education at the primary, secondary and higher

levels, one would imagine that all countries would prioritize early childhood development (ECD), and set the foundation right for a healthy education regime. This, however, is not so in the region, as indicated in the article *Setting the Foundation Right: Early Childhood Education and Development in Southern Africa*. This leaves one wondering whether the compromised quality of education in most countries is a direct result of the shaky foundation on which it is being built. The region could learn from countries such as South Africa and Botswana, with relatively more resources, but still struggling to provide quality education, as exposed in this article by Jennifer Roberts.

Moving up to the primary and secondary school levels, the major challenge has been matching the demand for education with the needed supply of human and financial resources and facilities. Thus, while many countries have made great strides in improving access, questions have arisen as to whether the human resources and facilities available can guarantee good quality and relevant education – an issue Grace Kaimila-Kanjo explores in the article *Quality Education: The Nerve Centre of EFA*. Sherri Le Mottee takes the debate further, exploring the place of key universal principles such as human rights and democracy, as a measure of the quality and relevance of the education that is being offered to shape and mould the citizens of tomorrow in the region. Not only has the quality of the content offered come under scrutiny, but so has the quality of the infrastructure and of the teachers delivering the services. Hence, in the article *The Case for Private Schools for the Poor*, Grace Kaimila-Kanjo also highlights the potential that private schools have in complementing public schools, in terms of both quality and access to primary and secondary education.

Further up the education ladder, the issue of access again becomes problematic, especially for women, as there seems to be limited tertiary level facilities and opportunities. Young people completing secondary education are often not fully skilled to join the job market, and at the same time are unable to enter the limited tertiary education institutions. Yet one of EFA goals is to ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes. The sector generally remains under-resourced and not developed in most countries, with some countries not even having policies, as illustrated by Jennifer Roberts' article, *Locating Skills Development in the Framework*.

There is a need for all countries in the region to urgently address this gap, especially if innovative frameworks such as NEPAD, (which aim to transform the socio-economic status of the continent through, among others, revitalizing and extending the provision of educa-

tion and technical training, as well as expanding participation in secondary school level and improving the relevance and quality), are to be realized. Similarly, adult literacy and education seems to have been relegated to the periphery of national priorities. And yet, it is a known fact that adult literacy is a national asset: a literate workforce is a more productive workforce, among other benefits. Yet, as many as 137 million adults in sub-Saharan Africa are illiterate. One then wonders how the continent can build effective human resources without prioritising adult literacy and education.

Apart from governance, policy, quality and relevance issues, lack of co-ordination and clarity on the spaces that various stakeholders should occupy in the education sector is another major problem. Civil society, donors, the private sector and governments are not pulling their resources and efforts together to provide EFA with enough steam to keep rolling in the right direction. Grace Kaimila-Kanjo describes the relationship in her article *Government and Civil Society Relationship in EFA*, as a “love-hate” one, where government is happy for civil society to participate in resource mobilization and not so much in policy formulation. She also describes the lack of proper recognition and coordination of private sector education providers. Yet, Jennifer Roberts shows how models that allow for community involvement in education, have widened the space and accelerated the pace of EFA achievement in the region. Similarly, Nomthandazo Mbandazayo's piece, *EFA: A Key Open Society Ideal* also highlights the important role that funding partners can play in advancing and advocating for EFA.

Other challenges to EFA have been around mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS, where again the gap between policy and practice has seen many orphans and vulnerable children falling through the so-called safety nets that some countries have put in place.

However, amidst all these challenges, there are opportunities, for example with current trends in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, as highlighted in both Shafika Isaacs and Kim Tucker's articles, *Reaching EFA Through ICTs* and *Education out-of-the-Box*. There is also potential to strengthen partnerships so as to mobilize both human and financial resources towards EFA, as Nokuthula Lucas indicates in *Mobilizing Resources for EFA*. “There is need for permanent interaction between the administrators of education – the government authorities who are responsible for education, and others”, as Madame Graca Machel sums it up in her conversation with Ezra Mbogori. 🗨️

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