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Participation in the Education and Training Sector

Operations in the education sector can be greatly improved by increasing the participation of government officials, education professionals, local communities and the private sector. Such participation can increase the relevance and quality of education, improve ownership and build consensus, help to reach remote and disadvantaged groups, mobilize additional resources, and build institutional capacity. Participatory operations involve risks and costs, however, and certain preconditions are necessary for success.

Potential Benefits

Many Bank-assisted and other education projects have promoted the participation of stakeholders—from government officials and education professionals to community members, parents, students and employers—in design and implementation. Such participation can contribute in a variety of ways to meeting the challenges facing education systems in developing countries: to improving quality, promoting equitable enrollment, and controlling public costs.

Improving the Relevance and Quality of Education

In a sector where demand is often poorly understood, a fundamental rationale for increased stakeholder participation is to improve the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of projects by ensuring that learning programs match the needs of the populations they are serving.

Efforts to make the provision of basic education more responsive to community needs have included education vouchers for families, fund transfers to school boards, and various models of school or community based management. Colombia's *Escuela Nueva* program (Box 1) and the Baluchistan community support process (Box 2) provide two examples. The involvement of parents and other community members in decision making has, in many cases,

Box 1 Student and Community Participation in Colombia

Colombia's *Escuela Nueva* program was created in the mid-1970s to overcome curriculum, training and administrative deficiencies in multigrade rural schools. The program incorporates a number of innovative components, including participation of students in school government, and community participation in designing and supporting the school curriculum.

In each learning task, self instruction books guide students to identify examples, cultural elements from their own experience, and local materials to be accumulated in the learning centers. Teachers are encouraged to organize meetings with parents and discuss the material prepared by the students. Children also participate in health, sanitation and nutrition activities. In this way, the school gradually becomes a resource center for teachers, for agencies operating in other sectors and, eventually, for the community itself.

In addition, *Escuela Nueva* children are introduced to civic and democratic life through student councils. Students organize into committees to take care of discipline, cleaning, maintenance, sports, school garden, newspaper and library. They also cooperate in the instructional process by helping slower students. This is seen as an essential part of the curriculum as it creates linkages between the school and the community.

Evaluation of the program, which has expanded rapidly to some 20,000 schools, suggests that educational achievement and civic behavior compare favorably with the output of traditional schools, at similar costs per pupil.

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made the curriculum, teaching materials and school calendar more appropriate to local conditions and improved teacher and student attendance rates. The result has been to boost morale, reduce drop out and repeater rates, improve achievement scores, and expand enrollment demand.

In nonformal education, there has been a relatively long history of student and community participation. Programs have proved more effective in terms of attendance rates, learning achievements and behavioral change when learners help identify their needs, design and manage learning programs, and participate in developing learning materials. Not only are such programs more relevant to the knowledge and interests of the students, but also the participatory activities themselves support the learning process.

Similarly, the motivation and achievement of students in vocational and higher education have been enhanced when students and community based organizations participate in designing and managing programs to meet their needs. In these sectors, the participation of private sector employers has been particularly important

for improving technical standards and linking training to real employment opportunities.

Building Ownership and Consensus

In a sector as socially, politically and culturally sensitive as education, stakeholder involvement in policy dialogue helps to define the values on which policy is based and to develop consensus between competing interest groups. It also helps to ensure that proposed changes have the understanding and support of all the groups on whom successful implementation will depend.

In some cases where major policy reform has been envisaged, Education Commissions have elicited relevant information and views from many sections of society. Techniques for facilitating dialogue among stakeholders in policy or project design have included focus groups, workshops, conferences and, as in Botswana, innovative use of video technology. The Philippines (Box 3) is one of several countries where EDI workshops have been the catalyst for participatory education sector work.

Reaching Disadvantaged Groups

Participatory methods have often been successful where formal education systems have

Box 2

Mobilizing Community Support to Primary Schools in Pakistan

The community support program in primary education in Baluchistan provides a remarkable example of what can be achieved in adverse conditions through participatory methods.

Beginning with a pilot project in 1992, the community support program has already succeeded in establishing 198 new community girls schools in remote rural villages which had no government school and no tradition of parental involvement in schools. Enrollment of girls is 100 percent in many of these villages, with very high attendance rates.

To begin the participatory process, community workers went door to door, urging parents to form an association. In each of the villages, education committees have been created, responsible for selecting a site for the school, identifying potential teachers, and monitoring teacher attendance and student enrollment.

A local girl, educated at least to eighth grade, has been identified and trained as teacher for each school. After she demonstrates her commitment by teaching for three months on a voluntary basis, mobile teacher training teams are sent to her home village to provide intensive three-month pedagogical training. This home training is needed because of cultural barriers that prevent girls from travelling far. Following the training, the teacher becomes a government employee: government rules, which normally require teachers to have matriculated, have been stretched to accommodate the program.

The pilot project resulted from the initiative of a Pakistani consultant. The Bank task manager, with whom she discussed her plans, recognized the potential of this approach and was able to organize USAID funding for the pilot. The consultant subsequently formed a small NGO in order to qualify for funding from other sources, which now include local and international NGOs, USAID, UNICEF and the government of Baluchistan, through a World Bank loan.

At the project preparation stage, when the pilot was tried, there was no way of knowing whether the approach would work or not. The success of the pilot led to full acceptance and ownership of the program by the government, and the government itself is now funding the program on a province-wide basis using IDA credit. Because of the experimental nature of the project, World Bank support to the program has only been possible through the new lending approach which supports the entire primary education program rather than selected components.

proved least effective—in serving the needs of girls (see Box 2), remote communities and marginalized groups. Participatory social research, as used in the Gambia to investigate the reasons for low attainment of girls in primary schools (Box 4), can help identify the policy measures needed to counteract the bias against disadvantaged groups. Expertise in bringing educational opportunities to the poorest communities, and in promoting the education of women, is found in NGOs which have experience in working with community based organizations and the necessary flexibility to adopt participatory methods.

Mobilizing Resources

The experience of participation through cost sharing in education has been mixed. Efforts to generate community contributions of cash, materials or labor to school construction, for example, have tended to be most successful in remote areas where the influence of central government bureaucracy is weak. They have been least successful when communities have not participated in decisions concerning location, design, construction, school management or education priorities. The support of parents and other community members, through fees or voluntary contributions, is motivated by their having a voice in such decisions and confidence in the value to them of the school or program.

Building Institutional Capacity

As in other sectors, participation by stakeholders in designing and managing programs in the education sector can also yield substantial long term benefits beyond the individual project, by strengthening the institutional capacity for sustained development. The process of participation empowers individuals and enhances their ability to contribute to the wider development process as new skills are learned and new norms adopted. Although these external benefits are very difficult to measure, they can be inferred from many of the project reviews.

Costs and Risks

Evidence in the education sector suggests that higher initial costs may be incurred in participatory projects in order to carry out the necessary social research and community work, to disseminate information or organize

workshops. Furthermore, project costs may be understated when the opportunity cost of voluntary time and effort is very high. These additional costs, however, are generally offset by subsequent gains in efficiency.

There is some risk that the allocation of costs may be inequitable, or place an excessive burden on the poor, in participatory projects where substantial community contributions are sought. For example, even the contribution of labor in school construction has been found to be beyond the means of some of the poorest communities. Estimating the ability and willingness of communities or individuals to share in costs needs to be approached on a case by case basis, in the context of equity objectives.

Difficulties which have been encountered in participatory projects include delays in implementation, and dependence on charismatic project leaders. The risk of abuse by individuals, local elites or interest groups also has to be borne in mind, as does the potential for misuse of funds.

Commitment to a process of dialogue among groups of stakeholders involves its own risks, which must all be taken into account: the timing and possibility of reaching consensus are uncertain; political conflicts are liable to be

Box 3 Building Borrower Commitment in the Philippines

The participatory process used in education sector work in the Philippines is reported to have called for much more time and patience on the part of Bank staff than would have been the case with a more traditional Bank approach, but it is hoped will pay off in terms of government commitment.

This work started with an Economic Development Institute workshop, focusing attention on the characteristics of effective schools, how schools improve, why schools were not working well, and what the priorities of reform should be. This was followed by another national seminar on the same subject. A method of broad stakeholder involvement, through a participatory workshop for project design (the ZOPP methodology), was used with 40 people from each broad geographic zone. From these participants and other stakeholders, a team was selected to draft a national implementation plan. Having secured ownership in the sector, the exercise is now being extended to the central agencies where the decision to borrow or not ultimately lies.

exposed; and there is a risk of generating social unrest by raising unrealistic expectations among participants.

These costs and difficulties notwithstanding, the risks of very expensive failure in participatory projects are judged to be much smaller than in a typical, top-down education project, where lack of sustainability may not be recognized until after significant investment is complete.

Conditions for Success

The most important preconditions for success in participatory projects are political will on the part of central government and commitment by key actors. In cases of weak political will, support for participatory approaches has been generated by sustaining dialogue and demonstrating potential benefits through pilot projects.

Institutional conditions may make participation more or less difficult to achieve, while simple scarcity of management and communication skills may be the main constraint to increasing participation in some of the poorest countries. It is often necessary, therefore, to build an education or training component into a participatory project in any sector to overcome skill shortages. Information sharing and dialogue

are also important to success; in demand driven education projects, communities must have access to the best possible information on technical options, costs, benefits and opportunities.

Because of the need to respond flexibly to developments as the project evolves, making education projects participatory calls for additional skills and greater tolerance of uncertainty on the part of the task manager; and it puts a greater onus on the quality of project preparation, clarification of objectives and project supervision.

Task managers who are promoting participation in education projects say that success depends on attention to the following critical elements:

- early stakeholder analysis and involvement;
- information sharing and dialogue among stakeholders;
- flexibility in the funding, timing and scale of projects;
- institutional strengthening; and
- appropriate systems of monitoring and evaluation, and mechanisms for ensuring accountability.

Box 4 Participatory Research in the Gambia

An innovative approach was used in a recent survey in the Gambia to gain a better understanding of the reasons for low enrollment and high drop out rates of girls in primary education. In addition to conventional survey methods (including questionnaires in schools, teacher interviews and parent focus interviews), the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were adapted to education, to counteract the bias against disadvantaged groups and provide a voice to people who are not usually heard.

Thirteen local researchers, including statisticians, Ministry of Education staff and teenage girls (to interview their peers) were trained in PRA methods. After trials in three villages, the team carried out a series of projects in seven villages and seven urban schools. Focus group discussions were held, where community members were asked to explain their problems and how education related to those problems. Villagers constructed matrices of community and educational problems, drew seasonal diagrams on income and expenditure, constructed social-educational "maps" of the village, identified households with girls of school age, and provided a wealth of socioeconomic information.

One of the most startling results was the discovery that one quarter of all the school-age girls (those who were pregnant, married, or about to be married) had remained "hidden" from enrollment statistics since they had not been counted by villagers in the initial census. Costs to parents, including indirect costs, and the coincidence of school fee payments with the season of lowest income, were seen as the biggest problems associated with education. As a result of this research, various measures have been introduced, including a change in the timing of fee payments.

The work was followed up by a second project, working with two rural communities to examine practical, community based solutions to the problems identified in the first project, and to assess available community resources for implementing such solutions. Options deemed by the community to have the highest chance of success were included in a Community Action Plan. Women in one of the villages, for example, decided to start a communal farm and to devote half the income from sales of farm produce towards school costs for girls.