

CEF in Uganda

Some Early Successes and challenges

The key partner for Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) in Uganda is the Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU). FENU membership includes a whole range of national and international NGOs, faith-based organisations, Uganda National Teachers Union, the women's movements, child-rights campaigners, the, HIV/AIDS activists and even a network of women' lawyers (FIDA Uganda) and individual educationists. Other civil society partners that are implementing CEF mandates in collaboration with FENU at district level include Anti-Corruption Coalition Apac (ACCA) and Bundibugyo NGO Forum that are technically supported in budget tracking by Uganda Debt Network (UDN). In addition, FENU is strengthening its district networks to promote grass-root participation in the development and implementation of education policies in the country.

Neither Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) nor major donors took FENU seriously at first when it was established three years ago. In the past year, however, this has changed dramatically. With CEF support FENU is now expected to play a key role in the development and implementation of education policies in Uganda.

For many years education policy in Uganda has been set by the Ministry of Education and Sports in consultation with a handful of powerful bilateral and multi-lateral donors under the formation referred to as Education Funding Group (EFAG). The move away from separate donor projects towards multi-donor sector-wide programmes and budget support has, if anything increased the power of these donors in setting the direction of educational reform nationally. In this context, strengthening the participation of national civil society is of crucial importance. Whilst this may act as another pressure on the Ministry of Education and Sports, it is at least a pressure from national society, from Ugandan citizens informed by local realities, rather than from external consultants.

FENU has been active in recent months in influencing the Education Sector Review (ESR) and processes that will feed into the Education Sector Investment Plan (ESIP) II and the education elements within the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) - Uganda's PRSP. In each case FENU members have worked hard to ensure that core positions are agreed in advance of key meetings, so that representatives inside the meetings can speak to an agreed platform rather than speaking for themselves. This was very evident during the May 2003 ESR workshop. By prioritising issues collectively and working in close coordination, FENU has had more success in influencing change. As far as possible, positions are based in grassroots experience and FENU place emphasis on bringing grass-root voices to the forefront – the FENU secretariat invites activists and officials from remote districts to speak directly at national meetings.

FENU has seen significant progress in respect of three main issues over the past few months: around government policy on disadvantaged children, on the education of internally displaced people and on exposing corruption and reforming disbursement systems.

In respect of **disadvantaged children**, FENU compiled an overview of the different experiences of NGOs in the field of Non Formal Education (NFE) especially successes, best practice and challenges. The NFE programmes in the districts of Mubende and Masindi, Nakasongola, Moroto and Kotido, and Kampala supported by ActionAid, Save the Children US, Save the Children Norway and GTZ respectively were covered in the overview. These programmes have been effective in reaching some of the 15% of Ugandan children who still fail to access government schools (in spite of the Universal Primary Education policy of the government). These experiences were also presented to the Members of Parliament (MPs) from these districts so that they could raise the issues in relevant parliamentary committees. FENU also submitted a petition to the parliamentary committee responsible for social services seeking appointment for the civil society to present education issues especially the NFE and the implications for the educationally disadvantaged children. Before recess a couple of weeks ago, the parliament brought out for mention in the house the need to debate and pass the draft policy. We hope that when parliamentary session opens at the beginning of June 2003, the draft policy may be discussed and endorsed by parliament providing a ground for planning and implementation of programmes that will meet the education aspirations of the disadvantaged children.

FENU also shared the experiences in the Education Sector Review in May 2003. As a result the government committed itself to funding the education of 67,500 children in existing NFE centres in the country within the UPE Capitation Grant from July 2003 and to working towards a fully integrated system within the framework of inclusive education. The challenges so far are the claim by MoES that there is no fund delivery mechanism to the 67,500 children in the NFE centres and exclusion of payments of para-professional teachers from the budget of NFE. Whilst much remains to be resolved (e.g., recognition of para-professional teachers within government payroll), it seems likely that government funding will be channelled into supporting NFE within the mid-term expenditure framework from July 2004. It is also hoped that the draft policy for educationally disadvantaged children will be presented to parliament over the coming year to help address the barriers to education of the disadvantaged children. With FENU's efforts, the costed policy for the disadvantaged children was included in the Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF) beginning July 2004 by the end of the May 2003 ESR.

A second major area where FENU has helped shift the government's education agenda has been in respect of education for **internally displaced children**. There are over one million internally displaced people in Uganda, especially in the North as a result of many years of conflict. Some children have been abducted to fight. Others have been forced to leave their homes owing to fighting, and still others find themselves orphaned by the war. Until recently there was no recognition of the impact of this displacement on education.

This changed when FENU organised workshops for eight different districts affected by the war, bringing together different NGOs, government offices and district education officials. Northern Region Education Forum (NREF) was formed to create a platform for sharing information and creation of dialogue with various stakeholders. The districts include Pader, Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, Apac, Kotido, Masindi and Nebbi. With support of FENU, the forum discussed and mapped out the scale and nature of the challenges in provision of quality education to the internally displaced children. Case studies of children who had lost out on education were collected, documented and shared. The forum presented to the MoES the concerns for the displaced children to sit for primary leaving examinations by end of 2002. This was addressed. The forum also decided that the documented experiences and challenges facing the displaced children should be used by a select committee of eight District Inspectors of School (DIS) from the districts above to raise awareness at a national level especially MoES. With support of FENU, the District Inspectors of Schools from the eight districts prepared and presented evidence at a national meeting to the Ministry of Education and Sports senior officials and a section of the donor community. Part of what they were able to show was that existing systems were too rigid to respond to the emerging challenges due to the conflict, and that UPE Capitation Grants needed to be made more flexible. They also showed that there is a need: to train teachers in psychosocial skills; to increase the bursaries for children from the Northern districts at all levels; to support skills development programmes for the youth who have missed formal school through community polytechnics and finally an urgent need for all stakeholders to recognise the scale of the education crisis in Northern Uganda. Due to the highly captivating presentation, the Ministry and the EFAG members requested FENU to take the process forward to comprehensive write-up to inform the May 2003 ESR and undertake to provide periodic updates on the issues presented. As an immediate result the EU and UNICEF have channelled emergency funding into setting up temporary shelters for the education of displaced children.

A third area where the civil society is having a positive impact is in **Apac district**. CEF is supporting the building up of district level alliances to ensure that they have clear roots and do not end up just as a Kampala based network, divorced from the grassroots. There has been a lot of progress in Apac already. Here, “**Community Monitoring Groups**” have been set up in 10 sub-counties. Each of these groups involves 12 people (at least one boy, one girl and four women). These groups monitor the local school budget and strengthen local people’s involvement in decisions around how to use the budget. In the process many of these groups have exposed serious faults in the present disbursement system, poor quality of classroom construction, misappropriation of building materials by contractor and civil leaders and unscrupulous award of contracts. Indeed, they have reported a number of cases to policy while a number are in the local courts. Other cases have been raised for discussion with and follow up by the District Local Government authorities. Some findings have been used to discuss changes with the District Education offices and others have fed into the Northern Region Education Forum and presentations at national level. On the basis of their experiences at this level, the groups have formulated recommendations for changes in how the disbursing of education funds should take place at national level – in order to ensure greater transparency. Since the Ministry and donors are increasingly in search of mechanisms for eliminating inefficiencies and corruption, the Coalition is preparing a presentation at national level and there are hopes that their recommendations will be taken seriously. The

participation of the coalition and the monitoring committees in the education planning and review at the district and school levels has saved the district that would have been heavy resource losses and at the same time has improved public accountability.

These Community Monitoring Groups have a role that goes far beyond just the budget – they are a mechanism to give local people confidence that they have a right to have a say over what happens in the local school. If teachers do not turn up then parents are now confident enough to denounce them. If abuse takes place in the school, teacher and the local leaders are no longer immune. The groups are also a means for children to have a greater say in the running of their own schools and contribute to the planning process. In the same district, with the technical support of Save the Children Norway at Acenlowor in Chawente Sub-county, children have been empowered by the formation of child-monitoring committees in schools. The children are tracking education expenditures, assessing their learning environment and recommending what they would want the education system to help them become. They develop action plans for improving the school environment and then make presentations based on these to the School Management Committee and the school administration, sometimes even taking their presentations to district or national-level policy workshops.

In **future** FENU will be taking on many other issues, such as the impact of HIV on education, the importance of women's literacy, early childhood education and the involvement of the corporate sector to support education for all goals and targets in Uganda.

However there is one development that might undermine all these gains. On 21st March 2003, the **IMF** invited the Civil Society Organisations and a cross section of the Donor Community to a dissemination workshop of 10 years experience of IMF work in Uganda. In their presentation, the IMF officials strongly suggested that the donors and NGOs should reduce funding support to Uganda since the excessive dependency on donor funds undermines macroeconomic stability and economic growth. If this recommendation is taken seriously one of the first things that is likely to be cut will be donor support to education. Certainly it is hard to argue for increases to support for education if overall donor funding is declining. There is an urgent need to confront the IMF on this and to get clear pledges from them – demanding that they consider support for education to be a sound medium and long term investment in all cases. Otherwise, the IMF message will be so strongly internalised by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development that it will be almost impossible for the Ministry of Education and Sports to secure more funding for education (whether from domestic resources or from donors). This concern needs to be addressed at an international level. There is a clear and fundamental conflict between this sort of IMF position and the Dakar pledge / the World Bank's Fast Track initiative and the achievement of all the MDGs.