



Country Context

In The Gambia, missionaries introduced western education during the nineteenth century, but it was seen by the rural population (which was, and is still, predominantly Muslim) as a tool for converting their children to Christianity, it was, to a very large extent, resisted (CSD-MFEA, 1995: p7). Education was seen primarily for fostering communication between the colonial administration and the subjects, consequently; only one school was established in the rural area to prepare the sons of chiefs mainly for leadership. Hence, for a very long time, educational facilities were concentrated in the urban area and as a result, the majority of children in the rural area did not have access to education. On attainment of independence, the colony (the urban area), which comprised approximately 13% of the total population of the country, had 44% of the primary schools and 86% of the secondary schools. This was a trend that continued until the inception of the Education Policy 1988 - 2003 which ushered in an era of expansion of educational opportunities. The Revised 1988 - 2003 policy and its successor policy 2004 - 2015 both aim at increasing access to, and improving the quality and relevance of, education.

Basic Education in The Gambia comprises the first nine years of education. At the inception of the 1998-2003 period, a 6-3-3-2 system was introduced, however, in 1996, following the revision of the policy, government committed itself to providing nine years of uninterrupted basic education to all. The first six years is considered as lower basic while the following three years as upper basic. The broad objectives of basic education for the remainder of the policy period up to the year 2003 include; increasing the gross enrolment ratio in Basic education to 85% of 7-15 year olds, taking into account enrolment in Madrassas, improving the quality of education by providing trained teachers, teaching learning materials and, improving learning outcomes. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has been on the increase from the 1990s especially if the Madrassa enrolments were included. This has created the need to put some emphasis on Madrassas in order to capture the missing children in the conventional schools as well as mainstreaming of the Madrassa as part of the basic education delivery system. A good number of parents in the rural areas prefer to send their children to local 'Daras', where children are engaged on the farms of the 'Marabout' (the religious teacher) and their parents have little control over them.

Enrolment of girls has witnessed a gradual rise in quantitative terms following the policy drive to increase access, especially in rural areas. Since the introduction of the Scholarship Trust Fund for girls in 1999, the reduction of fees at the upper basic and senior secondary levels and the introduction of the Girl Friendly School Initiative in 2001, growth in girls enrolment at the lower basic level has averaged 4.6% per annum while at the upper basic, the average

growth was 10.3%. Despite the increase registered, challenges confronting the education of girls still remain. These include barriers emanating from socio-cultural factors, school environments that are perceived to be insensitive to the needs of girls, and early marriage/ teenage pregnancy.

Key Achievements

- ❑ Booklet on “Education expenditure Analysis” developed by Pro Poor Advocacy Group. This has been used for training and as a basis for budget advocacy.
- ❑ Dissemination of the New Education Policy (2004-15) by Gambia Teachers Union to members using summary leaflet, focusing attention on policy areas for advocacy.
- ❑ Syllabus development for Madrassa schools to include the relevant national curriculum through the General Secretariat for Islamic/Arabic Education (GSIAE)

Breakdown by Criteria

CRITERION 1

Much of the progress reported by the MTR against criterion one is related to funding and facilitation of individuals and groups participating at key events where they can share information and ideas. One reported result is closer collaboration between the Government education sector and the national CEF. Publicity has also been achieved through several activities during the Global Week of Action. An additional success is work on the New Education Policy 2004 -2015, highlighting provision of staff quarters in remote areas and a need to revise education legislation. This was possible through CEF support to the Gambia Teachers Union. Almost twenty CSOs have been invited to the validation of the national CEF plan and eleven have expressed an interest in working with CEF. Links have also been formed with UNICEF, DFID and Standard Chartered Bank. In addition, close ties with CEF Ghana and CEF Kenya have proved useful.

Like many other programmes, the Gambia MTR identifies the small number of capable CSOs, a lack of specialist skills among partners, a lack of “good proposals” and the busy schedules of the management committee as challenges.

CRITERION 2

The production of a booklet on education expenditure and resource allocation highlighted high spending on personnel emoluments leaving little for the provision of teaching and learning materials, compensation for teachers in difficult areas and basic amenities to attract female teachers into rural schools.

CRITERION 3

With support from CEF the General Secretariat for Islamic/Arabic Education has been able to align syllabi and unify timetables ensuring that children receive science, mathematics, English and social and environmental studies classes. This process of unified learning is set in place to be adopted in almost 200 Madrassas. CEF is planning to support an Islamic Boarding School for girls in a sustainable way; purchasing a milling machine to cut down labour hours and provide opportunity for income generation.

Case Study: Reviewing education policy

CEF supported Gambia Teachers Union (GTU) in bringing together representatives from a cross-section of their membership to review the New Education Policy 2004 - 2015. This activity was undertaken with a view to making it easily understandable, and to develop information/ communication materials to be used for sensitisation activities for GTU members. A summary leaflet and advocacy posters have been developed. The exercise was successful in sensitising the GTU executive members on the Policy and related essential documents (such as the Education Act). It is hoped that this will encourage them to develop a greater sense of responsibility and ownership of the New Education Policy document. The exercise has enabled the GTU executive to realise the areas in the Policy that need urgent attention if the teachers' welfare and performance are to be enhanced. These include the issue of the provision of staff quarters for teachers in schools in remote areas of the country. Furthermore, it highlights the documents that need updating for the effective implementation of the Education Policy. Revision of the Education Act 1992, among others, is being advocated for at the highest level.