

Community schools are a viable alternative to public schooling in rural Upper Egypt, enhancing enrolment, educational attainment, and completion rates.

Community Schools: Filling the Education Void in Rural Upper Egypt

Egypt Network for Integrated Development

Policy Brief 005

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Abstract

Community schools provide a viable alternative to public schooling in rural Upper Egypt, enhancing enrollment, educational attainment, and completion rates.

The Need

Access to quality basic education is key to attaining national and international development goals. And, despite efforts in educational reform in Egypt over the past two decades there still remain stark inequalities in the current system, evident in enrolment rates, attainment levels, building infrastructure, teacher competencies and financial investment in education. These inequalities are further aggravated by geography, gender and socio-economic status, with girls from the poorest 20% of the population, living in rural Upper Egypt, being the most adversely effected.

Ministry of Education figures place out of school children at 15.9% at the primary level, with a gender gap of 3% at the national level, and widening at sub-national levels, particularly in rural Upper Egypt.² For those that actually attend school, the net enrollment rates at the public primary school level, including al Azhar schools, is reported at 87%.³ Only 20% of children from the poorest 20 percent are enrolled and complete the basic education level, compared to 80% of their wealthier counterparts. And approximately 8.5 % do not continue from primary to preparatory education due to economic reasons, and insufficient school space in rural communities.⁴

In addition to enrolment issues, there are also disparities in student achievement. Approximately 23% of the children from the poorest 20 percent actually fail at the primary school level compared to 9% of children in the rest of the population.⁵ In standardized Maths exams, primary students from Upper Egypt all performed at below the national average, compared to students from the northern region, who all tested at or above the national average. It is important to note that girls scored higher than boys on all the tests.⁶

Contributing to this situation, in addition to student poverty and cultural gender biases, are factors of poor quality teachers and school infrastructure which impact students' ability to interact and learn. In general, primary school teachers are less qualified than preparatory and secondary teachers, and lack professional development. Those most qualified are usually posted in urban areas. In addition, a high teacher to student ratio is much more evident in primary, rural schools.⁷ While overcrowding is an issue

¹This policy brief is based on a paper by Malaak Zaalouk, presented to the African Development Bank entitled *Analysis and Policy Recommendations for Better Access and Quality of Basic Education in Rural Upper Egypt*. It was developed as a chapter in a series of papers on social policies affecting communities in Rural Upper Egypt for the Egypt Network for Integrated Development (ENID).

²Ministry of Education (2013b), *Situation Analyses of the Primary Level of Education in Egypt*, a report presented to the Strategic Planning Unit for 2013- 2018 at the Ministry of Education, Cairo

³Ministry of Education, 2010 *The Situation of Education in Egypt: A Report Based on National Indicators*. Cairo.

⁴Ministry of Education Ministry of Education (2013c), *Situation Analyses of the Preparatory Level of Education in Egypt*, a report presented to the Strategic Planning Unit for 2013- 2018 at the Ministry of Education, Cairo.

⁵Ministry of Education (2013a), *Situation Analyses of the Pre-primary Level of Education in Egypt*, a report presented to the Strategic Planning Unit for 2013- 2018 at the Ministry of Education, Cairo.

⁶Ministry of Education (2010), *The Situation of Education in Egypt: A Report Based on National Indicators*. Cairo.

⁷ibid

overall in the Egypt, approximately 10% of schools have more than 70 students per class at the primary level, and 35% had more than 40 pupils in class.⁸ Moreover, a total of 20% of schools in Marsa Matrouh, Luxor, Qena, North and South Sinai and Minya are not suitable as learning environments.⁹

Education public spending in Egypt is approximately 3.8% of GDP, (down from 4.9% in 2010) and 11.9% of total government expenditure, which is in line with most countries in the region.¹⁰ However, these figures are not sufficient to meet the needs of the population. With an 11.2% increase in student cost from 2001/2002 to 2009/2010, not all governorates are able to match the national average of per student investment. The impact of this on education, particularly in the poorest regions is catastrophic, especially when considering that there are a large number of villages and 748 hamlets deprived from schools.¹¹

ENID approach

ENID advocates an equity approach which focuses on providing greater access to basic education services. Focusing on Upper Egypt, this approach aims to increase equity in education by addressing issues of inclusion, child centered learning and community participation by establishing community schools in villages that are most deprived.

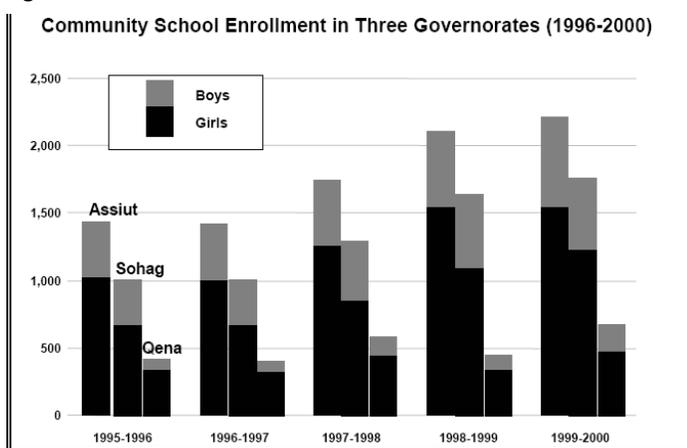
Results

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) conducted in 2007, a study of parallel education systems (community and home based schooling) in 9 countries including Egypt. Information and data were collected on access, enrollment, completion, learning, management, governance, and cost effectiveness. The study also included a comparison of students in the parallel systems with those in public schooling systems. The results in all cases showed that the parallel systems were equal to or better than public schools in terms of access, completion and achievement, community participation and cost effectiveness.¹²

This success is very apparent in the Egypt community Schools initiative, which began as a collaboration between the United Nations Children’s Education Fund and the Ministry of Education in Assiut, Sohag and Qena. The initiative was very well monitored and documented during its implementation phases, and to date

reflects the most accurate and published data available on community schools in Egypt. It was piloted

Figure 1:



⁸Ministry of Education (2013b), *Situation Analyses of the Primary Level of Education in Egypt*, a report presented to the Strategic Planning Unit for 2013- 2018 at the Ministry of Education, Cairo.

⁹Ministry of Education (2010), *The Situation of Education in Egypt: A Report Based on National Indicators*. Cairo.

¹⁰UNESCO (2011), *EFA Regional Report for the Arab States*, UNESCO Regional Bureau, Beirut.

¹¹Ministry of Education, 2010 *The Situation of Education in Egypt: A Report Based on National Indicators*. Cairo.

¹²DeStefano, Joseph et. Al. (December 2007), *Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling*. USAID Educational Quality Improvement Program.

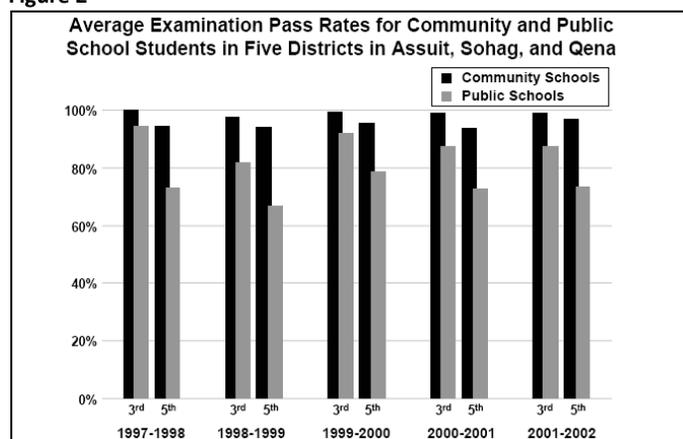
<http://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Compilation%20Reaching%20the%20Underserved.pdf> Accessed October 2012.

from 1992-1995 and expanded from 1995-1999. During this time there were a total of 202 schools, enrolling 4,656 students, 70 percent of whom were girls (Figure 1¹³).¹⁴ In 1996-1997 net enrollment for girls in those governorates was 63%, 61% and 71% respectively, well below the national average rate of 80%.¹⁵

Completion rates for students in Grade 5 in community schools in Assiut, Sohag and Qena was reported at 92%, higher than the national average of 90%. Moreover, in 2002, there were 2,393 community school graduates in preparatory stage, and 241 continuing to the secondary stage of education.

Quality of education and learning was also reported higher for community school students than for their public school counterparts in Assiut, Sohag and Qena. In 2001 community school students scored an average of 99% in Grade 3 and 97% in Grade 5 mandatory government exams. They outperformed public school students in the same districts by 12% and 24% respectively.¹⁶ Figure 2 shows that between 1997-2001, community school student achievement surpassed that of their public school counterparts.

Figure 2



Community participation in community schools is a critical success in the initiative. It provides communities with a sense of ownership and stewardship over the schools, by allowing community members to form the school board and have control over school location, hours, and selection of teachers. This in turn gives communities a vested interest in the success of each school, and in ensuring that students attend school and complete their assignments. It also allows for a social transformation within these communities where education is valued, and participation in governance is enhanced.¹⁷

While costs are difficult to calculate due to the manner in which figures are collected, disaggregated and analyzed, overall, community schools have also proven to be more cost effective than public schools due

¹³ All figures used are taken directly from, or compiled from data provided in Malaak Zaalouk's *The Pedagogy of Empowerment* (2004). To date it is the most comprehensive assessment and analysis of the community schools in Upper Egypt, and has been the basis of numerous international case studies on this topic.

¹⁴ Zaalouk, Malak (2004), *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press.

¹⁵ Iqbal, Farrukh, and Nagwa Riad (May 2004), *Increasing Girls' School Enrollment in the Arab Republic of Egypt*. Paper prepared for The World Bank and presented at Scaling Up Poverty Reduction: A Global Learning Process and Conference, Shanghai, China.

¹⁶ Zaalouk, Malak (2004), *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press.

¹⁷ DeStefano, Joseph et. Al. (December 2007), *Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling*. USAID Educational Quality Improvement Program.

<http://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Compilation%20Reaching%20the%20Underserved.pdf> Accessed October 2012.

to completion and achievement rates being higher. Figure 3 below shows a cost comparison based on the cost per community school student at \$114, and cost per public school student at \$164 for the 1998-1999 school year.¹⁸

Figure 3: Cost-effectiveness of Community Schools Vs. Public Schools in Rural Upper Egypt

| | Community Schools | Public Schools |
|--|-------------------|----------------|
| Recurrent unit cost per student | \$114 | \$164 |
| 5 th grade completion rate | 92% | 90% |
| Cost per 5 th grade completer | \$620 | \$911 |
| 5 th grade exam pass rate | 94% | 73% |
| Cost per 5 th grade student passing national exam | \$659 | \$1,248 |

Policy Implications

The equity approach requires targeting areas which are most disadvantaged to narrow the current gap, and ensure that overall education levels are maintained, and rise over the long run. Provision of access to good quality primary education, particularly in disadvantaged areas in rural Upper Egypt, requires a strengthening of the underlying collective institutions responsible for education in Egypt. And while some of this relies on direct monetary investment which is difficult in the current circumstances (unless serious reforms in public spending take place), there are other factors that can be considered, notably investing in a parallel education system such as community schools, and revisiting the administrative and institutional infrastructure and legislation to facilitate the operation of these schools.

Legislative level:

It is necessary to have a complete review of education investment, and to designate an appropriate percentage directly related to actual national needs as a percentage of the GDP and government expenditure. Allocation of funds should be positively skewed towards areas of deprivation, such as Upper Egypt. This review should take into account the actual figures directly spent on infrastructure, student cost etc., versus that spent on salaries, which is often the bulk of the allocated amount.

Laws pertaining to donor investment in education projects also need to be reviewed, especially those allowing funds to be directed to local initiatives and NGOs. Given the current economic crisis in Egypt, other sources of education investment have to be explored. Donors and NGOs at the local level are most likely to meet the needs in particularly deprived areas by contributing to community schools, teacher training, and student costs; and therefore their involvement should be facilitated.

Community schools run parallel to the basic education services provided by the government. The institutionalization of these schools, relevant curricula, and mainstreaming of community school graduates into the preparatory school levels need to be properly legislated and monitored.

Administrative level

Decentralization is key to allowing governorates to have more control over their financial resources. The Education Bureaus (*Modiriya*) in the governorates are more able to assess the needs of their districts and students. Community school boards should be established at the governorate level.

¹⁸Zaalouk, Malak (2004), *The Pedagogy of Empowerment: Community Schools as a Social Movement in Egypt*. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press.

Community participation has to be recognized and encouraged in rural areas. The contribution of community members to the educational process has proven vital in the success of community schools in both raising enrollment and attainment levels, particularly for girls in rural areas. This role should be expanded and recognized, and formalized within the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education needs to institutionalize a process of obligatory professional development for its teachers on an annual basis. The distribution of teachers in urban-rural areas has to be reassessed to provide advantages in areas where it is most needed. A key feature of success of community schools is the recruitment and cyclical training and development of locally recruited teachers.¹⁹ In particular, child centered pedagogies need to be developed and facilitators for community schools should receive specialized training.

Communities in rural areas should receive incentives that encourage their stewardship of community schools, such as tax breaks and priority in basic service delivery to encourage their participation, and to enhance the overall holistic development of these deprived areas.

Social level

Addressing issues of poverty and cultural gender biases affecting education will require pro-poor strategies, along with social protection reform and equity in development to be placed on the long term agenda. However, awareness campaigns on the value of education, and particularly, the importance and positive impacts of girl child education, should be revived.

Recommendations

- Conduct a needs assessment for the establishment of community schools in the most deprived villages and hamlets in Upper Egypt.
- Select facilitators that will work in these communities in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and develop a tailored training program. Training should begin as soon as possible.
- Develop a tailored action plan for the operation of community schools in collaboration with Ministry of Education, donors, NGOs working in the field.
- Develop an awareness campaign that includes focus group meetings to advocate for community schools in the selected areas to elicit community involvement.
- Establish community parent associations and channels of communication to facilitate their interaction with the Ministry of Education at the local level.

¹⁹DeStefano, Joseph et. Al. (December 2007), *Reaching the Underserved: Complementary Models of Effective Schooling*. USAID Educational Quality Improvement Program.
<http://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Compilation%20Reaching%20the%20Underserved.pdf> Accessed October 2012.

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- UNESCO (2011), *EFA Regional Report for the Arab States*. UNESCO Regional Bureau, Beirut.
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