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Chapter 7

Lessons for the future

Preliminary note: The substance of this chapter is from the research report prepared for the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, held in Cape Town in December, 2006. Some amplifications and additions have been made.

'The person who asks question doesn't lose their way.'

Nigerian proverb

The question and the context

UPE in question

In this book we have asked and tried to answer one question: *How can Commonwealth developing countries, once having attained Universal Primary Education (UPE) – assuming they will be successful – maintain it?* Some have come near to it before, but have had setbacks and have not been able to sustain it. Their experience can be useful in suggesting guidelines for political leaders and educational policy-makers on what directions to take and what pitfalls to anticipate and, preferably, avoid. Such guidelines should obviously be useful in informing strategies for *reaching* UPE as well.

All Commonwealth countries have committed themselves to the establishment (or re-establishment) of UPE by the year 2015; but as mentioned in Chapter 1, the 2006 Global Monitoring Report has raised serious doubts as to whether a number of countries, particularly in Africa, can reach that goal. Yet some of the nations now apparently struggling have in the recent past come near to UPE, at least in terms of Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs). Moreover, there has been important progress since the meeting of the World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000. Kenya has moved up 13 points on UPE, Tanzania 40 points and Ghana 8.

Our enquiry into the vicissitudes of primary education (or 'adventures', as the authors of Chapter 5 have put it) in five Commonwealth African countries was undertaken to learn from collective experience, for the benefit of Commonwealth policy-makers. Every country has specific political, socio-economic and cultural circumstances, which will affect educational demand and colour educational provision; so no one would claim that there is a universal magic formula for arriving at UPE and staying there. But from the experience of five very different countries it has been possible to draw out some generally applicable lessons and basic principles. Their validity derives from the concrete examples studied.

The choice of the five countries – Ghana, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria and Tanzania – was

explained in Chapter 1. The cases, as presented in Chapters 2 to 6, have been studied and described as objectively as possible and, in presenting a picture, which for every country includes mistakes and problems, as well as successes, do not in any way impute blame or criticism. The point of the enquiry is to seek positive lessons.

This chapter looks first at some major contextual issues, then describes some of the common aspects of past UPE efforts, and goes on to a detailed look at factors likely to help or hinder the sustainability of UPE – that is, what plans and strategies seem likely to work. It also mentions specific examples of instructive experiences in individual countries.

UPE in International and Commonwealth context

In the 1960s, the drive towards UPE was fuelled by visions of nation-building. There was *determined political leadership and social will.* These two factors remain crucial. Sustaining UPE will always depend on committed political leadership more likely to persist, where there are stable political regimes – and also on active community participation and support. Such stories as those of the early days of *harambee* in Kenya and *ujamaa* in Tanzania can still teach us this.

The wider context is now very different. There is much greater international commitment through agreement on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. This has provided the momentum for a renewed drive to UPE (a 'resurgence' as the authors of Chapter 4 have put it) and prompted the devotion of substantial new external resources to it. Paralleled with debt relief, African countries have therefore more financial resources to achieve their aims. There is still, however, a serious question as to whether, in the enthusiasm of international gatherings, Commonwealth African countries have entered into unrealistic undertakings.

The great progress achieved by some countries and the optimism it has engendered may perhaps now be at risk, with the economic recession likely to tighten budgets. Countries reliant to any extent on international aid may begin to fear that international pledges will not be kept. Here is a role for Commonwealth educational leaders: to campaign for the carrying through of all such pledges.

At the same time, there is another issue for Commonwealth educational leaders to reflect upon. Given the greatly increased awareness that UPE programmes require very long lead-times – demonstrated amply in the case-histories in this book – perhaps African countries have been tied to the reins of an international juggernaut and need to reflect on the ownership of their UPE programmes, setting up their own time-frames and pacing themselves on what actually looks doable. This is not to suggest that an international collaborative initiative isn't helpful. The EFA programme has rekindled interest and provided inspiration, but unrealistic targets can foster unrealistic planning and a constant lagging behind targets can be discouraging.

It is suggested that Commonwealth countries could work together to ensure continued international support for EFA and also to revise lead-times and targets for achieving and consolidating UPE.

UPE in the 21st century: The Big Picture

The last half-century witnessed many fluctuations in primary enrolments, for reasons which we will consider later. They include failure of political commitment, economic or political instability, planning deficiencies, civil war, natural disasters and the arrival of HIV/AIDS. The picture, though, in almost all Commonwealth African countries is one of expanded school populations and of an upward movement of Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) – which indicate how far school provision has kept pace with population overall. Since the late 1990s, when the world community took up the banner of Education For All, most Commonwealth African countries have crept forward in net enrolment. Our research has shown that Tanzania, for one, has made outstanding progress.

This is modestly encouraging, though there are three *caveats* to enter into the picture. *One* is that most countries have populations which are left out or 'hard to reach'. Enrolments are low, for instance, among the pastoral Fulani and other nomads in Nigeria (estimated at some nine million people) and among the Maasai in Tanzania, as well as the people of Kenya's North Eastern Province. In Zambia, the very scattered low-density rural population has less opportunity for education than easy-to-reach urban children. In contrast, in Tanzania, urban children may be left out because there are not enough schools to cope with the numbers. Countries setting their sights on UPE come to realise that 'the last ten percent' will be the hardest to involve. This is already a major challenge for South Africa and is becoming so in other countries as they approach UPE.

The *second caveat* is about figures. Children who arrive in school may not necessarily stay there and it is incumbent on education ministries to look also at attendance statistics and at transition from one level to another. Dropouts (or pushouts) and repeaters must also be monitored. This is not just a matter of understanding the real dimensions of primary education – and not being lulled into false complacency by the enrolment figures – but also of studying the reasons for dropout and repetition, in order to reflect on ways of overcoming these problems. Where such monitoring has been undertaken, it has produced quite worrying information. In Kenya, cumulative dropout in the decade to 2005 was 37 per cent. Overall, it seems that nearly a quarter of children in Commonwealth Africa do not stay in school long enough to acquire permanent literacy and numeracy skills – a tragedy for them and a poor use of public resources. *Any claims to have reached UPE based on figures for initial enrolment will be bogus.*

The *third caveat* is that numbers don't tell anything about quality. Education policy-makers are concerned to ensure that the education to which their nation's children are exposed will be worthwhile. This is partly about a suitable physical environment, partly about appropriate curricula and learning materials and also quite largely about teachers. It is taken for granted that successful and good quality UPE requires an adequate number of well-trained teachers; but it isn't always appreciated that those teachers need reasonable pay and conditions and also opportunities for continuing professional development. Teachers who don't have the chance to keep up with curricular change and with younger, more highly trained entrants to the profession, will not only lose morale and interest in their work, they will be unable to deliver quality. One of the CEC research team suggests that to enlist teachers fully in any drive for UPE, their unions should also be fully consult-

ed and enlisted in any campaign. They should have a stake in UPE and understand that its achievement is their success.

The picture, then, is of real progress, but of a need to move beyond basic enrolment to stable school populations, increasing at a more regular rate of growth, beyond the mainstream children to those who are harder to reach, and beyond simple numbers to good quality learning, nurtured by good committed teaching.

'Near-UPE': How it was reached and how it changed to 'Further- from-UPE?

Political decisions and public reaction

In all the cases studied, there was a political impetus to UPE. Political leaders around the time of independence regarded education as hugely important and it featured more strongly in declared policies than such other social provision as health. Some politicians made sustained campaigns, as in Western Nigeria on the cusp of independence, where UPE proposals were in the manifesto on which the Action Group government was elected and where there was extensive and widely-reported debate among elected members before the legislation was passed. Later, in other cases, the policy was simply announced by the Head of State, as in the Federation of Nigeria in 1972, when General Gowon promulgated universal free and compulsory education – inevitably it did not happen, but his successors pushed it forward as the case-study shows. Similarly, in 2003, the newly elected President Kibaki announced the revival of free education within days of the opening of the new school year. The ministry had to go into crisis mode.

The story in all the countries is one of successive jolts towards UPE. Changes of regime tended to bring about a renewed commitment, as the Ghana case illustrates. The Nkrumah government's Education Act of 1961 established the legal basis for compulsory primary and middle school education; the NLC regime in the late 1960s, Colonel Acheampong's government in 1972, the Rawlings government of 1981–91, the NPP elected in 2000, all in turn undertook educational reforms with some relation to primary education. Such constant new starts were partly because education was high on the political agenda and partly because of setbacks or loss of momentum in previous programmes.

The reasons for the various moves to promote UPE varied in different countries and at different times. In early days, it was, as already seen, associated with nation-building and in Nigeria some programmes were prompted by the desire for national integration. In Kenya, it was seen as an ingredient in development; in Zambia, as a pre-requisite for human capital development. The Ghana government recently announced that it wanted 'an efficient, credible and sustainable education system that will make the nation competitive in today's globalised economy, which is becoming increasingly knowledge-driven'. How far these views of political leaders and policy-makers have been shared by the ordinary citizen is a matter of guesswork.

One feature of all these sudden policies and new starts was that they somehow were implemented because the civil servants managed to get them on the road, in spite of short notice and absence of planning. Their work is not usually acknowledged, but it deserves to be.

Political leaders and public officials both had a head start because of sympathetic public response. Where there have been no inhibiting demographic, cultural or religious forces, people seem to have an urge for education. Even when the quality is not very good, even in times of disruption, they have continued to send at least some children to school. (This does not mean they have not been critical; the evidence shows that they have become disillusioned when the education is low-grade). Both in Tanzania and in Zambia, the story was one of pent-up demand, demonstrated by popular involvement, through *ujamaa* in the former in the 1960s and, in the present day, through the Community Schools movement in the latter. In Zambia, it was noted by the researchers as striking that though 70 per cent of the population live below the absolute poverty line of $1 a day, the schools are full and rates of attendance and transition high. This does not, of course, mean that poverty is not an inhibiting factor – see later in the chapter.

Trends in UPE

Political will and public support were factors in the general increase in primary school populations through the decades between 1960 and 2000. The following figures show the increase in three of the countries studied:

Table 7.1. Primary school enrolment in three countries

	1970	2000
Kenya	1,427,589	5,730,669
Tanzania	856,213	4,042,568
Zambia	694,670	1,590,000

Bearing in mind the earlier *caveat* about raw enrolment data, these figures show that the trend was substantially upward. It was not smooth and as the Tanzanian case-study explains, an upward trend may still equate to a hidden decline in coverage, when set against population increases. All the countries studied reached a point where population growth out-stripped educational provision.

Some countries had severe difficulties owing to miscalculation in planning of the actual size of the population. In Ghana, for instance, on the eve of independence, Dr Kwame Nkrumah spoke of Ghana's population as five million; in the event, the 1960 census showed that the number was seven million, so that the goal of UPE was further away than had been thought or hoped.

Population increases still offer a critical challenge for most developing countries and demographic trends will need careful scrutiny by educational planners if they are not to defeat them. Table 7.2 gives some data for the five countries studied here.

In common with most developing countries, these five have a demographic profile in which the under-15 cohort is a very significant proportion; in three out of these five, over 2/5 of the population is under 15. Overall growth rates have slowed down since the 1975–2003 period, but they still pose sizeable problems to governments of keeping pace in educational provision.

Table 7.2. Demographic trends in five countries

	Population (millions)			Annual growth rate % from 2003	Population under 15 as % of total
	1975	2003	2015		
Ghana	10.2	21.2	26.6	1.9	35.2
Kenya	13.5	32.6	44.2	2.5	26.0
Nigeria	58.9	125.9	160.9	2.0	41.3
Tanzania	16.0	36.9	45.6	1.8	38.9
Zambia	5.2	11.3	13.8	1.7	43.7

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2005

Policies and plans

Some underlying motivations for UPE have been given above. Whatever the original drivers for universalisation, policies have been framed by education authorities with reference to a mainly economic purpose, with an emphasis on basic and technical skills. For parents and guardians, schooling gave hope of leading to paid employment (often in government service).

A more wide-ranging policy rationale is given by the researchers on Kenya (see Chapter 3):

> 'The vision of the Kenya Government on education is to provide every Kenyan the right to primary education, no matter what his or her socio-economic status, through the provision of an all-inclusive quality education that is accessible and relevant. This vision is guided by the understanding that quality education contributes significantly to economic growth and the expansion of employment opportunities. [It] is in tandem with the Economic Recovery Strategy Paper (ERS), which provides the rationale for major reforms in the current education system, in order to enable all Kenyans to have access to quality lifelong education'.

They go on to comment:

> 'the realization that provision of education to all Kenyans is fundamental to overall development because education is the key to wealth creation and self-esteem; it through education that we learn to value ourselves and then to enhance and preserve and utilize the environment for productive gain and sustainable livelihoods. Having promised to eliminate poverty, disease and ignorance at independence in 1963 and subsequently through the Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its application to planning in Kenya, the Government invested and continues to invest heavily in education ...'

There are several significant points in this statement. *First* is the decision to frame educational policy in the light of broad economic and social policy, relating education to wealth creation and livelihoods, and to the fight against poverty. *Secondly* is the shift from past dis-

course about employment to a discourse more realistic for most contemporary African economies about livelihoods. *Thirdly* are the non-economic elements included, such as self-esteem. *Fourthly,* educational quality is underlined. We have seen how in the last quarter-century, quality has often had to be sacrificed to quantity – now governments are encountering the issue of how to match quantity with quality. *Fifthly,* the expression 'life-long' is used; dealing with people past school age without ever having had meaningful access to schooling has led some countries, as we shall see, to move from the concept of UPE to UBE.

Policies were backed by legislation, with each country passing a series of education acts (or decrees). Ghana went further and enshrined 'free compulsory and universal education' in successive constitutions – 1969, 1979 and 1992. In Nigeria, the Federal Minister of Education in 2009 announced that the government was intending to revise the UBE Act to enforce compulsory enrolment and *retention.* He also promised legislation to establish *quality assurance institutions.* These actions show an awareness of the same messages which we have derived from looking at past UPE experience and indicate that his government sees sustainability and quality as two current concerns.

Primary education in the five countries varied in the number of years offered, with lengths of time shifting when policy changed. The current primary cycles are:

Ghana	6 years followed by 3 years Junior Secondary
Kenya	8 years
Nigeria	9 years
Tanzania	7 years
Zambia	9 years (1–4 lower basic, 5–7 middle basic, 8 & 9 upper basic)

Zambia was only able to supply lower basic schools in some places, so that in principle pupils were expected to move on to another school to complete the rest of the cycle; in practice, many left the system at that point.

It will be seen that perceptions of primary education structures were quite diverse. In Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia a model of Basic Education is now being used. Ghana's present policy is Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), with a component of two years pre-primary, 6 years primary and 3 years beyond; the institutions for the last three years are to be renamed junior high schools. In Zambia, the last two years are articulated with the secondary system. Nigeria moved from UPE to UBE in 1999; this was a paradigm shift, since UBE embraces pre-primary, primary and junior secondary (as in Ghana), but also mass literacy and non-formal education. One of the objectives of UBE is to deal with drop-out from the formal system. The CEC researchers say: 'The major achievement of UBE is that it has remained in force; even in uneasy political terrain' and they note that in the four years after UBE's introduction both primary enrolments and completion rates went up. The Federal Minister's expressed intention to revise the legislation implies that the concept has now taken root.

All the five countries experienced problems with planning. There were perennial problems of: lack of accurate data; pressures by politicians rushing to implementation before proper programmes could be worked out; lack of understanding of the true financial implica-

tions of embarking on (or re-launching) UPE; and occasional misunderstandings about responsibilities between different elements of government. In Zambia, there was, in addition, a lack of planning and implementation capacity. The World Bank and sometimes the UNDP intervened in many African countries to assist with planning, so there is a certain uniformity about strategies undertaken, even when there was no uniformity in the different countries' situations.

Often, even with the help of practiced national and international planners, it was not understood that introducing a new plan is not into a vacuum and there has to be allowance for 'lag-time' or left-over business from previous provision, such as teachers in the system with variant qualifications or pupils enrolled in earlier cycles and needing to take an obsolescent examination. It was also not always understood (particularly by politicians) that a plan does not come instantly into effect and there has to be preparation for change.

In the next sub-section, we move from planning to implementation. *Here, it must be re-emphasised that adequate planning, based on adequate data is critical to the guidance and maintenance of UPE and that each country needs its own high-grade planning capacity.*

Perils and difficulties

Effective planning depends on the availability of good data. Unexciting as it may sound, greater attention is needed than in the past to improving statistical information. This is necessary both at national and at local level and may have many applications. For instance, it is needed for school mapping and location, that is the distribution of schools in relation to population distribution. At the present day, with continuing large migration into towns and cities, there will be constant need for more school places in those urban areas. Planners should be able to help to assess the additional numbers.

The perils of 'planning without facts', to quote a famous book about planning in Nigeria[1], lead to such mistakes as those of the Ghana government in the time of Nkrumah, about the size of likely school populations. It has already been noted that many planners were caught unawares by the upward trend of populations, so that the size of additional provision, such as number of schools, number of classrooms, number of teachers, was not fully allowed for.

Perhaps no one could have forecast the economic decline of the 1980s, in which many African peoples suffered hardship and hunger, but governments had in any case not appreciated the *full financial implications of universalising primary education*. As already said, additional expenditure was (and is) needed year-on-year until populations stabilise; and there were extra costs, often entirely unforeseen, such as the appearance of many over-age children in the classroom when UPE schemes were launched or re-launched. The subsequent financial consequences of major capital expenditure in school building programmes were not always foreseen in the general eagerness to accommodate all pupils. After all, you cannot compel children to go to a non-existent school, nor to one falling down from lack of maintenance.

Dr Pius Okigbo, commenting on Nigeria's first development plan, said:

> 'The Nigerian planners did not fully take into account the recurrent burden associated with capital projects. In planning a capital programme, it is necessary to provide for the recurrent cost of running the facility when it is commissioned. The resources for this expense cannot be left to be found when the project is completed; it must be part of the planning. The lure of foreign financing blinded the Nigerian officials to the consequences of seemingly costless projects, whose running and maintenance costs must be borne fully by the recipient government in the fullness of time'[2].

With hindsight, some of these mistakes seem obvious, but they were factors in the difficulties experienced by African governments when UPE seemed to fall away from their grasp owing to its cost. Even at the present day, there are local and foreign donors, large and small, who prefer to provide buildings and plant (often with their name on!) and leave the recipients to pay for repairs and maintenance.

Effective planning requires *continuity* of policy and strategy. Constant lurching from one new initiative to another is not helpful. It reduces the value of planning, makes financial forecasting almost impossible and detracts from the stability of institutions. Both foreign donors and newly-elected politicians are prone to novel initiatives, but the message is that continuity is best. If UPE is to be attained and then to be sustained, only continuity will make it possible. This doesn't mean that mistakes noticed along the way should not be rectified and revisions made, but that any well-thought-out long-term plan should be used as a guide-post as long as possible. One of the misfortunes of the countries studied has at times been the rapid turn-over of personnel, both ministers and civil servants, so there is no institutional memory and no long-term familiarity and experience with plans drawn up, however carefully, by predecessors. Not surprisingly, this leads to inconsistency both in planning and implementation.

Crash programmes, driven by political urgency, carried their own problems. In 1974, Kenya hired large numbers of untrained teachers to cater for the increased enrolment which followed the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE – see below). The cost per pupil rose by 500 per cent and later the government felt compelled to reduce teacher recruitment and raise Pupil-Teacher Ratios, with, arguably, a reduction in educational quality.

Several of the authors of our case-studies expressed doubt over the quality of education at times of major expansion. A balance was not kept in among others, Ghana and Zambia, between quantity and quality; and it bears repeating that in the long term UPE will only be sustainable if it delivers acceptable quality. Peter Williams has, however, argued in the past that rapid 'jumps' in numbers are important in creating political commitment and public enthusiasm (Williams, 1979) and are maybe justifiable in terms of overall political impact; but once UPE is neared or reached, it has to be associated with appropriate learning outcomes and a useful experience for the children.

A very different kind of difficulty, partly associated with haste in implementation, emerged in the sometimes fraught relationships between different parts of government

and sometimes between governments and other agencies, whether religious or for profit. In most countries, the chief actor has been the Ministry of Education, with greater or lesser degrees of decentralisation. In Kenya, for instance, the responsibility is divided between central and local government, and a similar system exists in Zambia. While Kenya has arrived at a very thoroughly accountable system, in Zambia there has been concern about the accountability of local authorities.

In the more complex federal system of Nigeria, the division of responsibilities has varied over time. Initially, the centre was weak and major educational responsibilities rested with the Regions; but the arrival of military rule shifted the balance to a very strong central government, with various coordinating mechanisms. The States have the main control over the primary system, including over the deployment of teachers; but there are cross-cutting federal quangos, such as the National Commission for UBE and lines of authority can be very unclear, leading to distractions and inefficiencies. The Commissioner for Education in each State (responsible to the elected State government) has charge over the whole education sector, but alongside him/her is a State Primary Education Board, headed by an executive chairman, who reports directly to the Governor – although elected, a Federal officer. Greater clarity is now emerging, as a result of judicial decisions when cases of jurisdiction have been referred to the courts.

In précis, problems encountered along the road to UPE have been: demographic (population increases); political side-lining of professional planning or planning which is faulty in itself; connected to timing (eagerness for short-term implementation); and issues in intra-governmental relationships.

Plans and strategies for maintaining UPE

Major lessons from the recent past

Facing and understanding the various issues we have so far discussed, what lessons from experience can be carried to the future by Commonwealth Africa?

Summing up so far, we can deduce the following principles:

a Political will twinned with public support enabled countries to move nearer to UPE and they are still crucial in a context in which post-independence euphoria is a distant memory and in which economic concerns may dominate voters' interests – more effort will now be demanded to ensure community and grassroots commitment;

b It is a good expedient to enshrine free UPE in the constitution;

c Education must be framed against economic and social policy, (e.g. NEEDS in Kenya) – this is both rational and may help education to maintain its place against other budgets;

d Good educational planning depends on having competent national planners and good data for them to work on (including demographic data);

e In planning and monitoring primary education, providing more school places doesn't necessarily mean reaching or holding onto UPE; provision has to keep pace with population increase;

f Further thought is often required into the place of primary education within the overall education architecture. How many years constitute a sufficient basis for it and how does it articulate with other parts of the system?

g Universal primary education may be supported within a framework of UBE;

h Governments need to face squarely the financial implications of continuing expansions of the education system until populations stabilise;

i Expansion and crash programmes pose the danger of concentrating on quantity at the expense of quality. At some stages, this may have been inevitable, but in the present, stabilising the system will depend on a quality education acceptable to the public. Quality assurance mechanisms will be called for;

j A clear definition and understanding of the roles and jurisdictional responsibilities in education of different government agencies will avoid time-wasting and misunderstanding.

Demand and supply in UPE: Fees, advocacy and finance

It has been recognised how positively the publics in the five countries have responded to UPE programmes, but if UPE is to be sustained, public enthusiasm cannot be taken for granted without other action. The most successful action in pushing up demand has been *making primary education free.* In Tanzania, enrolments in primary schools tripled between 1973 and 1981 after the decision to abolish fees. In Kenya, they went up by one-third when fees were no longer levied and by almost another quarter when the building fund was stopped (this had been introduced as an alternative to communal labour on school buildings). Free education has without doubt been the strongest motivating measure and keeping it free will sustain motivation, especially in the present times of recession and aggravated poverty. Free education, of course, means more than the abolition of tuition fees. Other charges, such as building funds, sports funds and uniforms also have a negative affect on enrolment and dampen public interest. The difficulty is that once fees are remitted, to bring them back, as several countries did, results in the immediate alienation of poorer people.

Sustaining public interest will also depend on *continuing political advocacy* – the enlistment of the media, the educated classes, NGOs and local communities – and regular consultation with the various people concerned with education: parents, guardians, teachers, local opinion-formers and others. Sometimes lip-service has been paid to advocacy and consultation and ministries may have public relations units, but the two activities have to be taken very seriously indeed if public interest in and support for UPE are to be kept alive. This may be better understood now, when countries have democratic regimes and elected members and ministers, who depend on votes.

It goes without saying that, in the light of what has been observed earlier, that the quality of education has to be sufficient to convince parents and guardians that children will benefit from it.

Turning from demand to supply, in any discussion about achieving and sustaining UPE, starts from *appropriate finance.* First, since schooling costs money and expanding school provision costs ever more money, there is a danger that ambitions for UPE will stagnate

when the economy stagnates. This research was done at a time when economic conditions in Africa were improving, but the whole economic climate has now changed. We have already said how particularly important it will be to hold the international community to their pledges in support of EFA, but within a nation there will be tough decisions to be taken about budget priorities and education may have a hard fight to lay hold on the resources it needs. Tanzania showed what can be done in education in hard times, maintaining it 'on the cheap', but its achievement was due to special circumstances and does not provide an easily followed example.

Education, as noted, may survive better, in budgetary terms, if accepted as an essential part of development, through being embedded in wider social and economic planning. Recently, education in Commonwealth Africa has enjoyed a good slice of national cakes. In the countries studied, educational expenditure has taken from 14 per cent to 20 per cent and even up to 30 per cent of national budgets. Recently also, primary education has been allocated a good proportion of the general education sector finance (up to 60 per cent, reported from Kenya) – in contrast to its Cinderella status in the past. The important budget decisions will not now be between different educational sectors, but between education and other sectors of the economy. National priorities might shift away from education towards, for example, military spending. There will have to be hard bargaining and hard choices to be made, but at least, with civilian governments, military demands should not be as out of proportion as they have sometimes been.

Advocacy, mentioned above, may be of great importance in helping education authorities retain a reasonable budgetary share, even in these straitened times. At the same time, ingenuity in finding other sources of funding will be needed. The question of other sources will come up later.

Favouring and negative conditions for sustaining UPE

Educational policy-makers intent on strategies for successful UPE provision cannot ignore the fact that sustainability depends on *several non-educational factors* entirely outside their control. The state of the economy, already referred to, is one. Besides the effects on the budget itself, there are many other ways in which an enfeebled economy has an impact on education, including more particularly primary education:

- When an economy is weakened by a natural disaster such as drought, there will be other calls on the national budget, e.g. dealing with refugees in Tanzania;
- Disasters cause hunger among both the rural families and the urban poor. Hunger will keep many children from school and those who do attend will have a lowered capacity to learn;
- When there is inflation and salaries are low, teachers will be deflected from their responsibilities in school and may take on outside activities to support their households;
- Parents and guardians and civil society organisations will have less capacity to take an interest in school affairs;
- For poor people, there are always opportunity costs in sending children to school and when poverty is extreme, they may need their children's contribution to the family

economy, either through their labour or through their earnings, however small, in any kind of employment.

Other conditions with an obvious impact on education are *political.* If there is over-centralisation of authority, with little accountability, the UPE project may be endangered. At present, fortunately, most Commonwealth African countries, including all those studied here, have stable civilian administrations and basically democratic governments, in which people are participants. Democracy, however, does not necessarily imply that there are always strong accountable local community organisations ready to take on the tasks of advocacy and decentralised responsibility; their lack of capacity in the recent past was observed in Zambia. All the same, in the same country the phenomenon of community schools has emerged, and in some others there are beginning to be quite powerful local advocacy organisations, such as CSACEFA in Nigeria.

Allied to political conditions are *legal and constitutional* ones. Ghana's example in establishing a constitutional mandate for UPE is a reminder that such a commitment may make for an enabling political climate and is useful in reminding both governments and governed of their obligations (e.g. maybe even when it comes to the hard budget decisions mentioned earlier); but clearly it doesn't of itself bring about an any improvement in educational provision. Other elements of a legal framework may have an effect, such as laws making attendance compulsory (the newly proposed Nigerian legislation attempting to compel retention in schools is a new development). But laws which can't be enforced may simply bring the UPE project into disrepute.

Social factors will have an impact on the development of primary education and have to be taken into account in educational strategies. There are, for instance, a number of reasons why children may be absent from school. These include:

- Geographical distance and lack of transport;
- Family instability, owing to HIV/AIDS or migration – orphans having to find means of survival cannot easily go to school (and certainly can't find school fees);
- Gender-assigned responsibilities – at certain seasons, boys may be required to work in cattle-herding, farming, fishing or marketing, while girls may participate in farming and may also at any time be needed in the household for cleaning, food preparation, child-minding or looking after sick relatives; there are nowadays more of the latter, because of HIV/AIDS;
- Traditional ceremonies, such as initiation rites or village or family festivals;
- Sometimes there are cultural impediments to sending girls to school, including early marriage;
- Where parents have little or no education, the home environment may not be supportive of children's schooling;
- In some societies, children with a physical impairment, such as blindness, are left out of the school system.

All these are non-educational phenomena, but affect education. Policy-makers, in understanding such factors in the context of education, face challenges in mitigating their effects, such as conscious efforts to enlist civil society support for various programmes or devising stratagems to provide incentives to the poor (see below).

Strategies for success

A variety of measures and suggestions for upholding UPE have already emerged in this chapter. In this sub-section, some workable strategies employed by one or more of the nations studied are put forward for consideration and are supplemented by suggestions which were developed in the research team's discussions and consultations with a number of experts.

a The broad education agenda

A major issue is curriculum. This clearly works best if it is relevant to pupils' social and cultural background and takes account of some of the social factors listed above. At the same time, it seems that there is a deeply-rooted desire among parents to see teaching of a traditional 'academic' kind and this prompts a need for serious engagement with these opinions.

If the UPE programme is to reach the 'last 10 per cent', curricula will have to adapted to new categories of learner (cultural and linguistic minorities, children with special needs, less able and under-nourished children).

Large classes seem to be a persisting feature of the primary education scene. Different delivery mechanisms will have to be devised; those already used include double- and even triple-shift systems and open access programmes, such as Zambia's radio centres. Perhaps for technical difficulties, African countries seem to have done less in recent years to experiment with less orthodox means of educational provision, making use of modern technology, though there are successful programmes supported by the Africa Education Trust, in Uganda. Such programmes may be helped by current campaigns spearheaded by Ghana and India for Free Open Software.

b Partnership in provision

Partnership in the educational endeavour increases in importance in times of stringency. Such partnerships may be with international agencies (UN and similar bodies, national governments, international NGOs), civil society organisations and the private sector.

International donors, as already emphasised, may be very important to the survival of UPE. National governments are now used to negotiating with them and Kenya has found it fruitful to hold regular coordination meetings with them as a group. There are, of course, cautions in working with agencies which, quite naturally, have their own agendas and conditionalities. It may be counter-productive to accept an international partner's intervention, however well-meant, in matters of curriculum. We have a cautionary tale from Zambia, where FINNIDA provided everything for a Practical Studies course in the primary schools, but it was virtually ignored on the ground.

Major civil society organisations include religious agencies, which manage, or have in the past managed schools on behalf of the state. Each country already has mechanisms in place to ensure benefit from these organisations, which have often had a reputation for quality education (see for example the experience of Dr Wangari Maathai of Kenya, recounted in her book, *Unbowed,* 2007, London, Heinemann); but they too will have their own agendas. It may be useful for policy-makers to take a fresh look at the relationship.

Local communities have in the past made many sacrifices in support of primary education. In Tanzania in the 1970s, the ethos of self-reliance led to huge community involvement, with volunteer teachers and community construction of classrooms and teachers' houses. In future the role of communities could be that of active partners in a different way. However willing and concerned a community is, they ultimately become resistant to demands on their labour and to educational levies under the guise of 'cost-sharing', while they have no part in the decisions about their schools. A chance to play a part in the disposition of funds is provided in Kenya through its Constituency Development Fund.

The private sector may be involved in financial support, general or specific, e.g. the large American Foundations or a local company. At the same time private individuals or groups run schools as a business. Donations from companies or rich individuals tend to go more to higher education, by way of scholarships. Both Ghana and Nigeria already make a levy on business for educational purposes. In addition, it might be worth appealing to wealthy people to take more interest in primary education. Nationals abroad (the Diaspora) send generous moneys home to families and communities; they too would have an interest in primary schools if approached the right way. One cannot be too hopeful because the squeeze on business and employment may reduce what is available from both these kinds of private source.

Private schools, including many pre-schools, are now increasing in numbers and can be seen as taking some of the pressure off the state schools. At the same time, they benefit from such state provision as the training of teachers. Some countries already monitor their contribution and are working on regulatory systems to ensure integrity and quality.

c Appropriate teaching and learning environments

School buildings

For reasons of lack of maintenance, many school buildings are not very congenial places and there is also a constant need for new classrooms/schools, as there are still shortfalls. Where there is a substantial need for new build, the example of Zambia could be worth following, where the Ministry of Education set up its own building unit. Both for new build and renovations, there are minimal desiderata for a school for comfortable learning. The traditional rectangle of classrooms and dusty playground is not enough. A healthy school should have a source of clean water within easy distance and should have sanitation (separate for males and females). In areas where security is a problem, fencing for a safer environment will reassure parents, teachers and children. Although it is not the reason for providing such facilities, knowing they are there would be a factor motivating parents to send their children to school.

Besides school buildings, the old tradition of providing teachers with good low-rent housing in remote areas might act as an inducement for them to work for a stint in these less popular places.

There are of course situations in which the learning environment doesn't include a permanent building. Children of nomadic communities are served by mobile schools or 'flying teachers'. Incidentally, the Commonwealth Nomadic Education Forum, which met in Garissa, Kenya, in 2006, canvassed useful ideas.

Furniture and learning materials

In past times of stringency and economic stagnation, children have been asked to bring their own stools or chairs; but suitable furniture should be part of a school's normal accessories. So too should be simple materials to support learning, such as posters and pictures. These can brighten up even an old school building; though they need changing regularly, otherwise they become torn and dusty and merely add to the air of dilapidation.

Incentives to the poor

Although we have seen that many families are ready to make sacrifices to send children to school, all the cases showed a large rise in enrolment when fees were dropped and a further rise when other hidden levies were also stopped. Free education should be without hidden costs to the poor, who are the majority in all the countries studied. If it is truly free and if there are other motivating factors like the kind of learning environments just described, families may be more ready to forego the opportunity costs in losing child-labour for farming and housework.

Other valuable incentives are school milk and school meals. Kenya received assistance from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to make school milk available to primary children. Ghana attempts to provide lunches and our researchers noted this with approval. It is a moot point whether breakfast would be better, for youngsters who arrive at school in the morning without having eaten anything.

There is a long tradition of boarding schools in all the countries studied, but usually it is regarded as better for children of primary age to stay with their families and go to school nearby. Sometimes the schools are not so close and Ghana has provided some transport, to help enrolment. Also, because of the large numbers of poor orphans, some governments have begun to think again about residential schooling, but this is an expensive option.

e Quality learning

To repeat, ultimately UPE programmes will be sustained and supported if they are of acceptable quality. It is encouraging to learn of new research into what is needed for quality in schools sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation in collaboration with the Gates Foundation; they have established an African Quality Education Forum. Meanwhile we are well aware that quality depends on a number of factors. We have suggested that teachers are central.

Teachers

A trained, high-morale and reasonably rewarded teaching force: this is the aim. At present only Kenya has an adequate supply of teachers and elsewhere teacher supply is not sufficient and classes are very large. Policy-makers and planners have an important challenge in reducing the pupil-teacher ratios. The Kenya study has a poignant quotation from a teacher in a school where there were five teachers for 500 pupils: 'You mark 500 books through the night – you have to relax and prepare for the following day's work. Even personal attention to weak pupils is impossible'. This is the fearful reality behind the neutral sounding statistic of a ratio of 100 to 1! Among targets for planners, reduction of such ratios must rank high.

Other tasks for planners and policy-makers are to:

- Regularly review the teacher education curriculum and consider the inclusion in it of ancillary skills, such as adult literacy (a long-standing component of teacher training in Tanzania). Obviously this would be unrealistic unless the teachers' workloads were reduced;
- Provide up-grading opportunities for teachers brought in under emergency training schemes;
- Provide for regular teacher professional development;
- Work out programmes honouring and rewarding outstanding teachers, to help restore their status in their own and the public's eyes.

School inspection

Most countries have a system of school inspection, but reports are that it has often atrophied. Plans for UPE could profitably include plans for a revitalisation of the inspection system. Effective and honest inspectors could be the front-line in any quality assurance system.

Support and reinforcement

Reinforcement of the work of primary schools by other institutions has been shown to be effective in maintaining UPE and maximising its benefits. First, *early childhood education* is recommended by many experts and the 2007 Global Monitoring Report, *Strong Foundations,* reminds us that 'Learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door' and advocates the value of ECC especially for 'the most vulnerable and disadvantaged'. Our cases report quite significant numbers of children participating – over a million in Kenya – but it is likely that they are mainly from affluent and urban homes. Ghana has, however, long had experiments in pre-schools in the markets, for the children of market traders. The GMR has a package of useful suggestions to education authorities.

Secondly, *non-formal education* has fallen out of fashion, but adult literacy and various types of community education reinforce and supplement formal provision at very low cost, as demonstrated by the Tanzania literacy programmes in the 1960s and 70s. Adult literacy programmes are part of the Nigerian concept of Universal Basic Education. Provision for family members who have never been to school or who left school early both ensures equity and reinforces the learning of children who do go to school. The late Paul Bertelsen of UNESCO coined the saying: 'Every child deserves a literate mother'; this is a reminder of how to help girls stay in school.

Thirdly, while in relatively well-off capital cities access to computers has reduced the demand for books, *libraries* are still form an essential component in educational provision for most children and young people in Africa. They may be established in the school itself, in a community centre or even be mobile, such as the Camel Library in North Eastern Kenya. Responsibility for public libraries has often devolved to local authorities; if they are to live up to it, there is need for training in their value, and also some incentives for maintaining a good library service.

All these may appear obvious, but in practice few UPE programmes include this kind of activity – a pity, since it would give substantial help to sustaining UPE.

Stringency and emergency

Most of this chapter has been about positive prescriptions for strengthening UPE. As economies are now likely to turn down, governments may, as already hinted, be forced to adopt alternative ways of keeping UPE on track. The histories show that there is also likelihood of short-term emergencies, such as the refugee influx into Tanzania. It is always difficult for large institutions such as ministries to be flexible, but flexibility and inventiveness have saved UPE in the past. Among creative strategies (already mentioned above) are double- or multi-shift schools and use of volunteers to support trained teachers in the classroom. The example of Tanzania, entering onto UPE 'on the cheap' if not copiable in the present, at least provides an inspiration.

The main symptom of emergency in the march to UPE is a shortage of teachers, sometimes the result of political haste, sometimes owing to a miscalculation of numbers needed. Methods employed to meet this kind of emergency have been:

- drawing retired teachers back into service:
- shortening residential training and completing courses while student teachers are already in the classroom;
- part-time emergency training at evenings and weekends for apprentice teachers;
- training packages of face-to-face and distance instruction, as in Kenya.

After the emergency period is over and numbers settle down, there will be a surplus of teachers with very basic training. They can be given an opportunity to up-grade their skills; Nigeria is doing this on a very large scale through the Nigerian Teachers' Institute, which is offering 100,000 teachers a chance to upgrade themselves through distance learning.

Special categories of pupil

Some possible categories of left-out children have been hinted at and they should be mentioned before we end.

The most visible – because the largest number – would be *girls*. Gender parity in education by 2005 was one of the Millennium Development Goals and it has not yet been achieved, although the enrolment records in Commonwealth Africa show boys and girls not too far apart. Continuation and retention statistics, however, show more girls than boys dropping out. Methods to get to parity include:

- A public education campaign to emphasise the value to families and society if girls are educated, deploying, among other public figures, religious leaders, since their authority is respected;
- Reassuring parents that girls will be safe at school (e.g. by fencing round, as suggested earlier);
- Promoting literacy for mothers; once mothers become literate, research has shown that they then become keen for their daughters to go to school as well.

Another significant category is made up of *children in large scattered rural populations.* We

have noted that there are new attempts to provide boarding schools, for orphans; but for the large number of rural children that would be a costly option. Small one- and two-teacher schools, with multi-grade teaching comprise an accepted answer at the present day and this solution clearly has to be recommended for the foreseeable future. Our CEC research has shown that some alternatives are being tried, such as mobile classrooms and rural transport. Now that the use of mobile phones is fairly widespread, in some countries it might be practicable to follow up the suggestion of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation to provide distance education by that means.

Mobile classrooms have already been suggested for *children of nomadic populations,* another category calling for special attention. As said above, if full-scale mobile schools are not immediately feasible, at least a cadre of 'flying teachers' could be developed to bring some chance of education to nomadic children; it is understood that this expedient worked well in Somalia in the 1970s. Once again, new forms of distance education could be tried (including mobile phones).

There are other groups which may be left out and form part of 'the last 10 per cent'. Each country will be aware of their own circumstances, but everywhere there are 'handicapped' children, in some cases including, sadly, children mutilated in wars. Special schools in urban areas are feasible, with children attending by day. In rural areas, children may be welcomed into mainstream schools, but the Commonwealth is fortunate in having a number of specialist charities with long experience of special, often residential, provision for the blind, the deaf and young people with leprosy. Owing to the short time the CEC had to carry out the research, we were not able to follow up this issue.

Conclusion

All the issues around the sustainability of UPE, as well as the challenges to policy-makers and planners and the possible strategies they might use, were brought into focus by the case-studies which make up the bulk of this book. At the end of the day, the main lessons learnt take us back to the beginning: to the very great importance of committed political leadership and committed and informed policy-makers and planners. Much past achievement has been propelled by them, often against the odds. But more than adrenalin is needed for long-term success in maintaining UPE, with gender parity, few dropouts and of a quality to meet society's expectations. There is demand, but citizens are owed greater accountability and greater opportunity to share in decisions and to govern their own schools. Further, if public support is to be kept and cherished, there can be no going back now on the abolition of fees.

Above all, the first requirement for successful UPE is efficient, realistic planning, based on good data. Cautious planners may make politicians and the electorate impatient, but it is not caution but realism to understand that UPE will not be kept on a steady keel just from enthusiasm and hustle. It will take years and will only survive if that enthusiasm survives – but together with a realistic strategy and necessary funding.

To the trio of committed leaders, supportive communities and efficient planners, we must add

fourthly all the teachers, who hold the key to school door. On their work depends the ultimate success or failure of Universal Primary and Basic Education.

The next few years are going to erode national economies while populations rise. We can only hope that their countries will once again beat the odds, with politicians, public, planners and teachers ensuring that UPE never drifts away again.

Notes

1 Wolfgang Stolper (1966) *Planning Without Facts*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard UP
2 Pius Okigbo (1994) *National Development Planning in Nigeria*, 1900–1992, London, James Currey and others