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Subject: EFA/FTI/GRA, comments Out of School Children

I have been working as an education advisor in Zambia, Mali and Yemen. Yemen is in fact my actual posting, though due to the uprising embassy staff has been evacuated last March, 2011. Since Yemen is one of the seven countries with the highest number of out of school children this GRA issue is relevant for the education sector.

Bert Huguenin

Comments

Ad I. Introduction

- An important reason for children being out of school is migration such as of nomadic families in the North of Mali. Another important reason is migration as a result of families moving to other areas, out of agriculture and looking for employment in urban areas. This element should appear more prominently in the paper. The World Bank's report No. 51927-YE "Coping strategies in rural Yemen and policy implications"¹
- Culture or more precise religion and tradition are often reasons why parents do not allow girls to go to school. Yemen is an example. Parents often do not believe there is any need to send girls to school or agree with girls to be married at the age of 11 or even younger just to receive the dowry, e.g. for reasons of poverty.

Ad II. A. Data gaps

The analysis is quite complete. Often the lack of reliable data is an excuse for lack of policy development or implementation of focussed strategies.

The design and implementation of a more reliable/complete EMIS are timeconsuming and difficult, often multi-donor supported, operations. In Yemen EMIS is under construction for about 5 years now. My message is to be very careful with radical changes and realistic in planning. The assumption to complete activity # 1 on data in one year seems to me far too optimistic.

Ad II. B. Policy gaps

Girls are indeed doubly disadvantaged. Culture and tradition in general and early marriage in particular disable girls to enrol or complete schooling. Lack of political will further complicate application of knowledge and new strategies/policies. This is more than a management and/or budget problem. In the proposed activity # 2 the development of a policy statement on out of school children should also cover the issue of early marriage. The proposed sensitivity training of government officials should also explicitly cover this issue and will have to be dealt with carefully. It is highly likely the issue will generate resistance.

¹ June 10, 2010. Page 42-46

Ad II. C. Management or implementation gaps

Conditional cash transfers do work in Yemen. The same applies to the training and recruitment of female teachers in particular for the rural areas.

The proposed activity # 3 will have to be in line with ongoing programs and not only with the FTI activities. The activity will have to be incorporated (not easy) in sectorplans and policies. In other words avoid a stand-alone project.

Conclusions

1. The three gaps: data, policy and management are highly relevant. Improving those three elements of education sector development is useful but inadequate to remove the barriers towards enrolment. Cultural / traditional / religious perceptions as well as poverty related issues, such as migration, child labour and conflict are in fact beyond control of the education system.
2. Focus of the GRA activity is very heavily on improving data collection and how to translate the right data to policy revision and management at local level. The result of the GRA activity might be improved results of EMIS and hopefully improved policy development and more effective management.
3. Avoid isolated projects/activities and look into the realism of the timeframe.