

## Foreword

The non-state sector is playing an increasing role in the delivery of education in a number of developing countries that are still striving to attain Education for All (EFA) and the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 'Non-state' is a term that presents its own problems of clear definition and focus. Broadly, it can be used to describe formal institutions independent of government administration, including philanthropically subsidised and faith-based schools, education delivered by not-for-profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community schools, and fee-paying private institutions. In many instances the latter classification is used interchangeably with the term non-state, especially as the recent growth in developing countries is happening amongst private providers. But the distinction between the different sectors is important as the dynamics of each have an impact on factors relating to access and quality issues, among others.

Private institutions for elite groups in society have been in evidence at all levels of the education system, while NGO, philanthropic and faith-based providers have been catering for poorer communities in many Commonwealth countries pre-independence. More recently, NGOs have been playing an increasing role in the implementation of donor education projects. However, it is fee paying non-state primary and secondary schools – previously associated with wealth and privilege – that have recently been playing an increasing role since the 1990s in parts of Commonwealth South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. This is a new low-cost incarnation targeted at much broader numbers.

With the EFA and MDG commitment of many countries towards 2015, the pressure on education systems to provide quality education for all has heightened the debate.

Evidence indicates that low cost private schools at the primary and secondary level have mushroomed in some of the poorest areas of Africa and Asia. These are often concentrated in the shanty towns (or 'informal settlements') of urban centres. While private sector schools may continue to carry the stigma of profit-making enterprise, their existence must be seriously considered given the limitations of many government educational systems in providing universal access.

The private sector is not only potentially more responsive to excess demand; another perceived benefit could be the setting of price according to the ability to pay, arguably engendering both cost-effectiveness and accountability. With many poor families unable to meet state school fees and/or other 'hidden' costs, such as school uni-

forms, books, etc., a competitive private alternative presents opportunities that some countries cannot meet at present.

This study has attempted to consider the impact of these private schools on access to education for the poor, the status of national enrolment rates, the quality of education, and transition to secondary school.

The growth of private schools has not been limited to countries where school fees and other costs still exist. In response to the challenge of meeting EFA and the MDGs, several countries within the Commonwealth abolished school fees, leading to an expansion of demand beyond the capacity of the system. With teacher shortages resulting in high pupil-teacher ratios and insufficient resources and physical infrastructure, the poorest communities have been the ones to suffer the most, leading to either lack of faith in what is available from public providers.

The report concludes by emphasising that private schools do play an important role in achieving education for all alongside state funded programmes. Public education alone may not be adequate to guarantee all children access to quality education because of resource constraints in the public sector. It is these gaps in public education that private schools fill. Private schools can help to achieve EFA through proper regulation, supervision and government support in both financial and material terms.

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