



*Improving the quality of education in Africa*

## **Link Community Development International (Link) and the School of Education, University of Edinburgh**

**Education for Sustainable Development Conference 30.10.2015**

Report by Tom Smout, Hannah Grieve, Lydia Moore, Rachel Barowy and Colin Dunigan

Link Community Development International (Link) was pleased to co-organise the Education for Sustainable Development Conference focusing on the 4th UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), Quality Education. A number of wide-ranging themes were discussed including the global agenda on education through the SDGs, approaches to inclusive and quality education in Ghana, Bangladesh and Nigeria, lessons from the Girls' Education Challenge in Ethiopia, and education at the national level in Malawi. The conference sparked a good deal of discussion and debate among those present, which included representatives from NGOs and the education community at the University of Edinburgh.

The conference began with Edinburgh University academic, Dr Gari Donn, welcoming all the attendees and introducing the speakers. All bios are included in Appendix 1.

### **Kenneth King: Construction of the Global Agenda on Education through the SDGs**

Professor King began by providing a brief background and history of SDGs, and specifically SDG4. This presentation mainly set out to discuss the causes and motivation behind the SDGs. Professor King asked his audience to consider: "For whom are these goals? Are they for all? Are they for some?"

Professor King described the several attempts at developing global education goals, beginning with the Muscat agreement from 2014. Muscat used percentages for goals which allowed for more accurate and measurable results, however these goals were set nationally rather than globally. This led to complications: when the long name first (OWG) began to construct goals last year, the targets seemed to contradict earlier set goals. Professor King used this as an example to illustrate the importance of properly organised global targets and aims.

The World Education Forum (WEF) in South Korea finalised goals and targets during a conference. However this conference took place at the same time as a UN meeting with the same objective and highlights the difficulties involved in coordinating international cooperation.

Finally, the UN took out all exact goals and replaced them with less specific language. For example, King said of one of the goals 'A *substantial* proportion of adults should be literate? What a scandal! There are 850 million illiterate adults in this world.'

Professor King also invited the audience to look critically at the language and text of the goals. For example, the terminology choices of using 'life-skills' vs. 'work-skills' means it is difficult to actually evaluate development due to poor phrasing.

### **Roger Cunningham: "The Learning Crisis: Three Stories of Hope"**

To challenge the audience's idea of what inclusive and quality education truly means, Senior Education Specialist, Roger Cunningham, invited the audience to consider three ongoing 'stories of hope', from Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria.

In order to first illustrate the real scale of the issue, Mr Cunningham explained that although global statistics show the majority of the world's children are enrolled in school this does not describe the whole picture. The number of children who actually complete their schooling is still worryingly low, and the percentage that leave with basic levels of literacy and numeracy is even worse. So how is this trend being combated?

The first of Mr Cunningham's case studies concerned Ghana. In 1995, the School of Life was established, an NGO designed to help integrate out-of-school children back into full time education. With the crucial support of Link Ghana, the Complementary Basic Education programme seeks to tackle underlying causes such as poverty, quality of teaching and also socio-cultural barriers that deter primary age children from accessing and completing school. Local people are trained as facilitators, who are given structured lesson plans and on-the-job coaching to teach disadvantaged children outside of school hours. Ninety five percent of children complete the nine-month programme and approximately eighty five percent integrate back into the nearest school.

The second case study came from Lagos. In this instance, in order to ensure access to a high standard of education almost all families opt to send their children to private schools. The running of these schools has become a multi-million dollar industry. Although government run schools are still in existence, they're largely considered to be unsatisfactory and few remain. Private schools present a reasonable alternative offering smaller class sizes and more student-teacher time. However, although students are receiving a good level of education at a relatively cheap price, the crucial downside remains that quality education is not free.

This led Mr Cunningham to talk about the third example, Punjab. Here, government run schools were also becoming less popular in favour of private institutions. However, to ensure that education would still be accessible for all, the government began a programme to 'adopt' these schools and cover the tuition fees, a scheme that now extends to all districts in Punjab. By being involved in the running of these privately owned schools, the government is also able to monitor and implement educational standards across the board.

While there is no one answer to solving what Mr Cunningham describes as the 'learning crisis', it is true that there are valuable lessons to be taken from these stories. In conclusion, Mr Cunningham encouraged the audience to think further on the strategies that could be used for inclusive education, and also interestingly, what role the private sector can play in achieving the post-2015 sustainable development goals.

## **Laura Garforth: Girl's Education in South West Ethiopia: Interventions to Support Elimination of Gender Disparities and Early Signs of Impact and the Road Ahead**

This presentation provided an overview of Link's role in improving the life chances for marginalised girls in the rural zone of Wolaita in south west Ethiopia, and the main outputs from the Girls Education Challenge (GEC) initiative, a DFID funded contract which is running over 4 years until April 2017. The contract aims to alleviate the gender gap in learning in the region, and Garforth made it clear that "a lot of kids simply aren't learning the basics."

It was encouraging to hear that the status of girls and women is steadily improving due to many different initiatives. Currently, of every 100 boys who enrol in primary schools there are 94 girls who also enrol. However, the challenges primarily lay in rural areas as well as in administration. Only 37% of primary school teachers are women, and in secondary school that percentage drops to 15%. Garforth emphasised that "the issue of gender is now on the agenda for many of these schools."

In terms of goals, GEC Output 1 included 'gender audits', core subject tests, school performance appraisal meetings (totalling 24,000 stakeholders), gender action plans and a significant amount of community mobilising around targets. GEC Outputs 2, 3 and 4 included training for parent-teacher associations and the creation of 'safe spaces' for girls and GEC Outputs 5 and 6 included tutorial classes for 12,000 at-risk girls, gender mainstreaming and capacity building. In the future, the initiative includes the potential for decentralising departments with technical assistance from Link.

The successes of the GEC initiative included effective partnership working with the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, delivery at scale, very high levels of support from schools and parents, incremental attendance, building self-confidence and community participation. Monitoring and evaluation is also incorporated into the programme design providing a strong dataset and the tracking of 1,500 girls.

Community participation in gender discussions had increased as well as gender capacity within schools. This included an increase in extracurricular activities for girls such as girls' clubs, and a system of rewards for girls. Additionally, the distribution of re-usable sanitary pads, underwear, and refurbishment of toilet facilities encouraged fewer girls to drop out.

Looking forward, Garforth concluded, there is a long way to go but for now there are a few criteria that may assist improvement: better analysis of impact, conditional grants, preschool education, and a better trade-off of teacher/student ratio versus funding.

## **Dr Fritz Kadyoma: Education in Malawi**

Dr Fritz Kadyoma, Programme Director for Link in Malawi, spoke about Link's initiative to help the government in Malawi to set and reach meaningful targets for improving its education system.

Dr Kadyoma Spoke about Link's assistance in gathering data on schools in Malawi as well as the methodology of the inspections. Of important consideration was the National Education Standards (NES) which represent a series of standards for all schools and is currently being rolled out across Malawi in partnership with the Malawi government. This obviously represents a huge achievement for Link and, hopefully, a meaningful step in improving education in Malawi.

The attendees and speakers then took a short refreshment break before splitting into breakout groups to discuss the different talks. Each group was asked to produce one statement to put across the main outcome of their discussions.

### **Kenneth King: Breakout Group**

Professor King convened a breakout session dedicated to discussing the wording and origins of the SDGs. The group benefited from several different perspectives, including students from Scotland, England, Greece, China and numerous other countries. Professor King was careful to engage each of them at some point in the discussion.

The group examined each of the components of SDG 4 in some detail and noted a common theme of vague wording and non-specific goals. There was some disagreement within the group as to the merits of the SDGs. Some felt that the goals laid out were reasonable and inclusive, while others felt that the goals were too vague to provide any meaningful guidance or objectives to the international community.

Also, there were concerns raised that the goals were representative of an overly orthodox attitude to education. The group remarked on the experience of Roger Cunningham, who had experienced the efficacy of cooperation between private and public education institutions in the developing world.

Session Outcome: SDG4 is not universal enough. Those members of the group from wealthy, industrialised countries felt that they were reasonable and inclusive, while those from elsewhere found them unsatisfactory.

### **Roger Cunningham: Breakout Group**

Roger Cunningham convened a breakout session dedicated to the discussion of his talk on alternate approaches to education and success stories in alleviating the educational problems of the developing world.

The group considered the different stories of success from Ghana, Punjab and Lagos. It was noted that private sector schooling was an urban phenomenon, common not only in Lagos but also in places like Johannesburg. It was pointed out that private education is not necessarily exclusionary but rather is privately funded and administered. One member of the group recalled their own experiences of schooling in Lagos, when at a public school they had been threatened with flogging if they did not buy their own chair and table.

When considering the Ghanaian programme of teacher training, Cunningham remarked that he was surprised by the sheer extent of the success of the programme. He felt that one of the major reasons for this success was the engagement with the community. He felt that the increase in the quality of teaching that the program caused was partly a result of a sense of duty towards the village members and elders by those trained in the programme.

When considering the different cases raised by the discussion, the group felt that the common thread was that an increase in the standards of education was the result of community incentives,

which were more economic in urban areas and more social in rural areas.

**Session outcome:** Community development is key. Work with what you've got.

#### **Laura Garforth: Breakout Group**

The main discussion question was which barriers to girls' education should governments and donors prioritise in pursuit of eliminating gender disparities?

Ensuring that the post-2015 education agenda contains a strong equality element has been a common theme in the global consultation. The main outcome of the discussion suggested that Link are aiming to make broader changes to society and education rather than meeting specific educational targets. There was discussion which questioned the effectiveness and wisdom of channelling funding according to donor priorities. This is also supported by a recent study of donor policies, practices and investment priorities (Mercer 2014) which finds that donors tend to focus on parity in girls' and boys' access and retention in education rather than on broader, and less easily measurable, issues of gender equality.

**Session outcome:** Link are aiming to make broader changes to society and education and questioned the effectiveness and wisdom of channelling funding according to donor priorities.

#### **Fritz Kadyoma: Breakout Group**

Fritz's group discussed whether the National Education Standards in Malawi could be used in other countries to support their movement towards achieving the SDGs. It was concluded that it would not be conducive to sustainable development simply to transpose the NES onto another country because one of the key strengths of the NES, which makes them sustainable, is the strength of ownership by Malawian stakeholders. They are seen as Malawi's NES, not Link's NES, and as a result stakeholders at all levels are committed to achieving them. However, it was felt that it would be beneficial for other countries to engage in a similar process to the one followed in Malawi. The process of NES development involved basing standards on what practitioners in Malawi regard as good quality education, building on existing formats where available, and doing extensive consultation with stakeholders at all levels from government down to schools and parents.

The role of NGOs in supporting the achievement of SDGs was also discussed. Participants reflected on Link's role in the NES development and concluded that NGOs can play a useful role in facilitating the development of national processes and systems, particularly as they can be seen as a neutral party and therefore be well placed to mediate between different groups of stakeholders and ensure that a wide range of voices can be heard in the development process. NGOs - like Link - may also have access to information about how similar processes/systems work (or don't work) in other countries and can bring this experience into the discussion. However, it was noted that it is important for the ownership and potential sustainability of the process that the NGO does not push its own interpretation of how things should be done because this is likely to falter once the NGO steps back.

**Session outcome:** It is likely that the standards chosen in other countries would closely resemble those in Malawi (children being safe and learning in school are likely to be universal ambitions), but

it is important that these are seen to be developed by education stakeholders for education stakeholders in the relevant context.

After the breakout groups concluded there was a closing address by Dr Martyn Roebuck, Chair of Link International. He summarised the main discussion points from the Conference and concluded that community involvement is essential for any planned or actual implementation of educational improvement programmes. He added that Link was glad to have hosted an event which fostered such interesting discussion and critical thinking. Therefore, he concluded, “we would like to extend our thanks to all the attendees as well as the speakers for their excellent contributions”.

Please contact Dr Samantha Ross (International Programme Director, [samanth@lcd.org.uk](mailto:samanth@lcd.org.uk)) or Dr Gari Donn ([G.Donn@ed.ac.uk](mailto:G.Donn@ed.ac.uk)) if you require any further information.

Please also find here the link to Link’s Biennial review (2013-2015) with information on our work: <http://ow.ly/V9xIR>

#### Appendix 1 Bios of Chair and all speakers

##### **Gari Donn – School of Education, University of Edinburgh; Executive Director UN House**

Gari Donn is Executive Director of UN House based in Edinburgh. She is also an academic in the School of Education at the University of Edinburgh with research and publications in the international contexts of policy borrowing in countries of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

With a PhD in the politics of nuclear energy, and through her work in academia and the UNH, she is committed to addressing wide-ranging concerns in education, peace and security and sustainable development.

##### **Kenneth King – Emeritus Professor, University of Edinburgh; NORRAG**

Kenneth King was the Director of the Centre of African Studies and Professor of International and Comparative Education at the University of Edinburgh till September 2005. He is now Emeritus Professor in the School of Education and also School of Social and Political Studies. His research interests have focused on the politics and history of international education, skills development in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy and on aid policy. Currently he is researching China’s higher education aid to Africa, as well as the Post-2015 Education and Training agenda. He is editor of the aid and international education policy bulletin, *NORRAG News*. He was on Global Monitoring Report Advisory Board for 2010-11, and on the expert group for the GMR 2012 on skills. He has recently completed a book on China and Africa (James Currey, May 2013), *China’s Aid and Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education*. He supported UNESCO in the development of their (2009) TVET Strategy. The Fundamental in Educational Planning, No 94, on *Planning Technical and Vocational Skills Development* (jointly with Robert Palmer) was published by IIEP, UNESCO in 2010.

##### **Roger Cunningham - Senior Education Specialist**

Roger Cunningham has worked in international development as teacher, teacher trainer, education

project manager, and as a programme and policy adviser in thirty countries. For thirteen years he was a senior education adviser with DFID and has also worked for the EU and Aga Khan Foundation. He now works as an independent consultant and is currently involved in work in Rwanda, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Roger has a particular interest in the role of the private sector in delivering quality basic education.

**Laura Garforth – Deputy CEO of Link Community Development International and Executive Director of Link Community Development Ethiopia**

Laura has worked in sub-Saharan Africa for thirteen years, based in Ghana and Ethiopia. Most of the projects she has managed have focussed on institutional capacity building with decentralised government education departments and encouraging meaningful community participation in school improvement. Laura is currently leading a Girls' Education Challenge project in south-western Ethiopia which aims to improve learning outcomes for up to 56,000 girls. She is interested in accountability of the NGO sector and sharing policy-aligned models of good practice with the potential for scaling up through ministries of education.

**Fritz Kadyoma - Programme Director, Link Community Development, Malawi**

Fritz Kadyoma has worked for over 24 years in the education sector in Malawi as a Secondary School Teacher, Curriculum Developer, Programme Designer and Teacher Trainer/Developer. He has also authored several books for the national curricula at primary and secondary school levels; and trained hundreds of education professionals on issues such as gender and education, human rights, Life Skills Education and school management. Fritz has a Doctorate in Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership from the University of Massachusetts in the USA and an MPhil in School Reform and Teacher Professional Development from the University of Cambridge in England. His Bachelor of Education Degree is from the University of Malawi. Fritz is happy to be currently working in Link Community Development as it directly supports Government of Malawi's strategy and policy on education through innovative strategies and practices that influence change at the grassroots level.

**Martyn Roebuck - Chair, Link Community Development International**

Began work in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s managing an aid project. Resumed after 30 years with the Scottish Office where HM Chief Inspector of Schools responsibilities had included the Education International Relations branch, the education research programme, and technical advice to OECD. Honorary Professor at Glasgow University. Since 1990s provided project management and evaluation support for government school improvement programmes in Uganda, Rwanda and Botswana, Malawi and Dubai. Involved with Link from 2000 through its work in Uganda, and Link Scotland from 2005, providing both governance and operational support.

Appendix 2 Speaker's Presentations (as separate attachments):

Kenneth King – Construction of the Global Agenda

Roger Cunningham – The Learning Crisis – Three Stories of Hope

Laura Garforth – Girls' Education in South West Ethiopia: Interventions to Support Elimination of Gender Disparities and Early Signs of Impact and the Road Ahead

Fritz Kadyoma – Education in Malawi