

QUALITY EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Citizens who can read, calculate, and think critically have better economic opportunities, higher agricultural productivity, healthier children, and better reproductive health. Fundamental educational skills form the basis for all future learning, but today too many students across the developing world—particularly the poorest—are missing out.

Many more children enroll in school today than a decade ago, an achievement brought about by leadership and policy changes at the international and national levels. But the promise of greater enrollments may not pay off. Just enrolling in and attending school does not guarantee mastery of even the most basic skills. The Hewlett Foundation's Global Development and Population Program, working in a unique partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, established the Quality Education in Developing Countries (QEDC) initiative to focus on ensuring that children learn to read, calculate, and begin to think critically by the end of third grade. QEDC has developed a strategy to demonstrate that significant changes in education—from teacher practice to donor behavior—are possible in a relatively short time.

QEDC supports global advocacy and in-country efforts to improve children's learning in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mali, Senegal, Ghana, and India. Its grantmaking activities are concentrated in three areas. Grantees are working to (1) increase awareness and accountability for student learning by improving public knowledge about learning outcomes; (2) support the development of effective instruction that improves student learning at low cost; and (3) advocate for sufficient resources to improve educational quality, and for those resources to be used efficiently. The result? Real progress toward ensuring that more children learn.

MEASURE LEARNING

Strengthening awareness and accountability for children's learning.

Despite huge expenditures on education, as well as dramatic expansion in student enrollment in primary school, surprisingly little is known about whether students are learning to read and write in the lower grades of primary school. As a result, both parents and policymakers do not know whether their efforts to educate children are paying off—and, sadly, often they are not. Raising awareness about the learning crisis not only informs; it can also provoke action.

The QEDC initiative increases public access to such information by funding civil society assessments of reading and math skills among school-age children. The projects are designed to assess student learning and share the results with the public, education



A girl learns to read and write in a school in Mali. The Quality Education in Developing Countries initiative makes grants to improve reading, math, and critical thinking among primary school students in sub-Saharan Africa and India. Photo courtesy of Dana Schmidt, Hewlett Foundation.



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administrators, teachers, governments, and donors to encourage educators and governments to improve student achievement.

At the global level, making the case for a post-2015 Millennium Development Goal indicator on learning will help ensure that success for education will be measured not just by school enrollment and completion, but by the knowledge and skills that lead to economic growth. Combined with advocacy from civil society, information about learning outcomes helps hold governments, teachers, and international donors accountable for the results that matter most.

IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

Demonstrating that low-cost, practical interventions can improve learning on a broad scale.

Good teaching is essential to making sure that students learn. Yet too often, government policies have failed to focus on improving the practice of teaching. For instance, teachers in many countries are not specifically taught how to teach children to read. In other cases, children do not have access to reading materials in a language they understand.

QEDC's grantmaking seeks to identify effective instructional approaches by supporting promising practices in government schools and external evaluations to assess their effectiveness. QEDC supports projects with well-defined teaching methods and materials to improve learning in the first three grades of primary school. The models respond to government cost constraints and existing school conditions (e.g., crowded classrooms, poorly motivated teachers with weak skills, and teacher absenteeism). Each instructional model is coupled with an external evaluation, including baseline data and a control group, to measure the impact of the model on student learning.

The goal is to provide evidence about cost-effective approaches to improve classroom practice and student learning. Testing of the approaches has been designed to ensure that successful instructional models can be replicated and institutionalized across each country and potentially adopted elsewhere in the developing world.

TRACK RESOURCES

Making sure education funds improve learning.

Governments and international donors invest billions of dollars in education every year. Unfortunately, their funds are not always allocated with the explicit goal of ensuring high levels of student performance. Equally troublesome is the fact that there are few tracking mechanisms to ensure that money reaches schools.

QEDC makes grants to organizations working globally and in our focus countries to advocate among donors and governments for sufficient and sustained investments directed at improving learning. It also funds efforts to improve the oversight of expenditures in education. To do this, QEDC has funded civil society monitoring of resource allocations, budget tracking, and innovative models for outcome-based budgeting. The objectives of our international and in-country activities in this area are to ensure that education budgets are transparent; that allocations maximize learning; and that parents, communities, educators, and education systems are held accountable for children's learning.



A teacher gives a lesson outside Coimbatore, India. Photo courtesy of Jeanel Drake, Mango Tree.