



# **Governance, Equity and Health**

## **An IDRC Program Initiative**

### **CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS**

#### **Project Profile**

Donor organizations increasingly support the idea that civil society organizations should be part of the policy process behind the current push toward sector-wide programming. This initiative is significant, given that the international community often calls upon civil society to play an important part in holding national governments accountable. Thus it is now common for civil society organizations to have a seat at national meetings where education sector plans are discussed with donors.

Despite this widespread endorsement of civil society's role in the governance of education, too little is known about the quality and effectiveness of civil society participation in the planning and implementation of sector-wide reform initiatives. In many countries, civil society capacity to engage in evidence-based policy advocacy is weak while sector-wide reforms often overemphasize the role of building capacity at the ministerial level rather than the community level. Accordingly, even where the role of civil society in the governance of the education sector is formally encouraged, steps to support the capacity of existing civil society organizations to participate effectively in policy-based discussions are important.

#### **THE PROJECT**

This research will explore the governance role played by civil society organizations in education sector reform programs in four case countries. IDRC will be specifically supporting research in Mali, while additional CIDA funding will support research in Tanzania, Kenya and Burkina Faso. In studying the Mali case the research team will begin to address, in a comparative fashion, the role played by civil society organizations in education and health policies building on the information coming from the work of the field research component of this project. This knowledge will help to generate a proposal for a longer term collaborative program of support for southern civil society organizations interested in

becoming more effective education policy advocates and partners.

#### **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

This research will explore the governance role played by civil society organizations in education sector reform programs in four case countries.

##### **Specifically this project aims to:**

- Provide a baseline assessment of the current capacities of civil society organizations to engage effectively in the governance of the education sector by documenting their capacity to hold governments accountable, produce evidence-based policy suggestions, and/or relay concerns from communities to governments

- Determine practical measures which might be taken to strengthen civil society and enhance its role in the improvement of educational opportunities for all
- Produce a state-of-the-art piece of comparative research that analyzes issues of governance, educational change and the role of civil society organizations in at least four case countries.

- b) The formation of a foundational body of knowledge for future comparative research
- c) The introduction of a preliminary discussion of the variation in civil society participation across sectors
- d) The provision of a hypothesis about the causes of variations in governance in participation across issues areas
- e) The publication of several reports or peer-reviewed research products and seminar presentations

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a clear definition of the concepts of governance and civil society. It will include a study of the linkages between civil society and the social sciences research communities in each of the selected countries. The desk studies preceding this research helped the researchers to select the more promising case studies in terms of individual case study learnings as well as comparative studies amongst them.

A range of activities that will generate qualitative as well as quantitative data constitutes the basic methodology. With respect to Mali, information gathered from available documentation, including official documents; it will also be collected through a series of interviews with senior staff members of NGOs working in education and health.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The IDRC-funded Malian component on the place and role of civil society in social policy reform will yield results pertaining to different areas of concern. Some of the outcomes expected are:

- a) The design of a model audit of civil society participation in the education sector

## PROJECT OUTPUTS TO DATE

In March of 2006, the team produced a review of the literature available in the public domain relating to Malian civil society, Malian education sector and sector-wide approaches to education. Moreover, several presentations have been made on preliminary findings of the desk study research in Canada. The teams has also presented their preliminary findings at the Annual Comparative, International Education Society Conference in Hawaii as well as the Canadian counterpart at York University.

## PROJECT CONTACT

For more information about the project, the participating institutions and researchers, please contact the project leaders at the following addresses:

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