

The Global Economic Recession: Rethinking “Education for All” Sustainability

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Abstract

In 1990, the Global community pledged at the world conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) and greatly reduce illiteracy by the year 2000. When these goals were not met, it again pledged to achieve UPE, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal and at the United Nations Millennium Summit with the target date of 2015. Since then, all nations, civil society agencies and development agencies have doubled efforts to facilitate the attainment of UPE. For example, in 2002, the World Bank together with other development partners launched the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) as a global partnership to help low-income countries meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the EFA goal. As a result of such concerted global effort, evidence available shows that a number of countries are on the path to achieving 100% access by 2015. But what will happen after all this is achieved? Is the global financial crisis a wake-up call to reconsider approaches to EFA provision? What strategies have low-income nations put in place to consolidate UPE gains and ensure EFA sustainability? The paper is a synthesis of EFA data and National Development Plans of the four African countries participating in the Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building (IAPRCB)¹. Based on the four case studies, it argues for a multi-track strategy geared at the reduction of donor dependency in education provision, while putting the concept of “education sustainability” at the forefront.

Key Words: *Economic Recession, Education for All, Poverty, and Sustainability*

Introduction

The recent global economic meltdown has got massive implications on the sustainability of systems driving nations globally, particularly in low-income countries. While all nations have been affected by the economic recession, the developing world, particularly countries in Sub-Saharan Africa whose economies depend largely on external support is likely to suffer most in the long run. Financial trends already indicate that the crisis has become contagious as exports from and remittance flows into many developing countries are diminishing (Migiro, 2008: p.1). The crisis is a threat to efforts “to reduce poverty and achieve other development targets, including those world leaders have pledged to achieve by 2015, know as the Millennium Development Goals” (ibid.).

Most governments in the developed world have responded to the crisis by devising means of budget cuts in order to revive their economies. Parts of the cuts will most likely be in the area of international

¹ The IAPRCB is a three year pilot project (2008-2010) funded by Irish-Aid with matching funding from Universities Ireland, to bring together all nine universities on the island of Ireland and universities in Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda in a unique, high-level partnership to develop a coordinated approach to research capacity building in order to make an effective contribution to the reduction of poverty.

development. This implies that developed countries may honour pledges already made, but are unlikely to make new major commitments. As far as their commitment to the global EFA goals, it is likely that support would continue to flow till the set date of 2015. But what will happen after that? Is the global financial crisis a wake-up call to reconsider approaches to EFA provision? What strategies have low-income nations put in place to consolidate UPE gains and ensure EFA sustainability?

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2007, p.1), "Aid to basic education in low-income countries more than doubled between 2000 and 2004, but decreased significantly in 2005". The decrease was before the current economic recession. It can be argued that the situation is likely to get worse given the prevailing economic recession.

This puts the onus on national governments and all concerned actors to play a major role in sustaining EFA. As the UN Secretary General has previously advised, "...the years ahead will require unwavering political will to consistently ensure that education from early childhood onwards is a national priority, to engage governments, civil society and the private sector in creative partnerships, and to generate dynamic coordination and support from the international community" (Matsuura in UNESCO, 2007: i). This paper is a synthesis of EFA data and National Development Plans of the four African countries participating in the Irish-African Partnership for Research Capacity Building (IAPRCB) with a view to examining their approach and progress towards EFA. Based on the four case studies, the paper argues for a multi-track strategy geared at the reduction of donor dependency in education provision, while putting the concepts of "education sustainability" at the forefront.

Progress towards Education for All

The Global Arena

According to the 2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2007, p.1), primary school enrolments rose from 647 million to 688 million worldwide between 1999-2005, with an increment of 36% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Out of the 129 countries, 51 have achieved or are close to achieving the four quantifiable EFA goals of universal primary education, adult literacy, gender parity and education quality. Fifty three countries are in an intermediate position and 25 are far from achieving EFA as a whole. Though the situation may look a bit bleak, given the preceding noted increment in enrolment it can be argued things are much better than they were a decade ago. Much progress made towards EFA has been through the support of donor agencies. While it is justifiable to be concerned about the 25 countries that are far from achieving EFA, it should be equally of much concern to imagine how the countries doing so well will be able to sustain these achievements. Already the 2008 EFA Monitoring Report has pointed to a major downturn in aid since 2005. Since the inception of the MDGs, the international community has been a strong supporter and aid to this noble cause. "Commitments to basic education increased from US\$2.7 billion to US\$5.1 billion in 2004 before declining to US\$3.7 billion in 2005" (UNESCO 2007: P.3). It is projected that if pledges are met, bilateral aid to basic education will likely reach US\$5 billion a year in 2010, far below the US\$11 billion a year required to reach the EFA goals (ibid.). Clearly, despite the huge commitment of the international community the quantity and distribution of aid for EFA still remains inadequate. "Too many donors are giving greater priority to

higher education levels of education, too high a share of education aid continues to go to middle-income rather than low-income countries, and levels of assistance to the latter vary widely by country” (UNESCO, 2007: p. 8).

Education for All in Malawi

Free Primary Education was introduced in Malawi in 1994 soon after attaining a democratic government (Government of Malawi, 2006). Enrolments increased from 1.2 million children in 1994 to 3.0 million in 1997. With over 95% Net Enrolment at the primary level, Malawi is among the 28 countries that are highlighted to have a high chance of achieving Education for All by 2015 (UNESCO, 2007: p. 180).

Despite progress made towards EFA there are still outstanding challenges that pose a threat to sustaining the gains. For example, the enrolment gains registered by the introduction of Free Primary Education are likely to be negated by the high dropout and non-completion rates. As Kunje (2007) notes, dropout rates of 15%, completion rates of 30%, attendance rates of 12% and pass rates of 30% seem to have remained at unacceptable levels. The reasons for increased drop-out rates were noted to be, among others, negative attitudes of certain communities towards education, especially for girls, long distances covered by pupils to school, early pregnancies; lack of food and clothes in households and poverty (UNDP, 2003: p. 8).

Furthermore, Education in the Malawi context appears to be undermined as a share of the national budget. For example, social services consumed an average of 31% of the total public expenditure while the share of the education sector, during the period 1994/95-1999/2000, was approximately 14% of the total budget (UNDP, 2003: p.3). There is a very high dependence on donor support to sustain EFA.

Education for All in Mozambique

Primary Education in Mozambique comprises two levels viz. 1st level (1st to 5th Grade) and the 2nd level (6th and 7th Grade). According to the Progress Report on the Millennium Development Goals in the context of Mozambique (UNDP, 2008: p.11), the country is on the path to achieving 100% universal primary education by 2015. The net enrolment rate in 2007 in the 1st Grade education had achieved a national average of 95.5% showing a significant increase compared to 2003 (69.4%). There is a slight difference between boys (97.1%) and girls (93.1%). The literacy rate has also grown from 46.4% in 2003 to 48.1% in 2005 (33.3% for women and 66.7% for men) – a huge gender disparity. Fortunately gender differences at primary level have reduced drastically with the girls’ ratio against boys at the first level of primary schooling substantially improving from 0.71 in 1997 to 0.9 in 2007. Gross completion rates have also improved, increasing from 38.7% in 2003 to 72.6 in 2007 at Grade 5. Gender variations at this stage are still visible, the gross rate of completion between boys and girls standing at 80% and 65.1% respectively. Thus, although the available data shows major efforts in reducing gender disparities, the differences still prevail. There are also major variations in education provision and quality between urban and rural areas.

Education for All in Tanzania

Tanzania is listed among the 63 countries that already achieved universal primary education by 2005, one among the 4 African countries on the list including Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia (UNESCO, 2007, p.180). According to Tanzania's most recent Millennium Development Goals Progress Report, by the year 2006 Net Primary Enrolment Rates in mainland Tanzania had risen to 94.8% and 77% in Zanzibar (MPEE, 2006: p.12). It is projected in the same report that by the year 2015, Tanzania would have achieved 100% universal primary education.

Besides successes with net enrolments, there are also other remarkable trends to be noted about Tanzania. There is near gender parity with regard to enrolment of girls and boys at the primary school level. Primary school retention rates (proportion of children enrolled in Standard 1 who complete Standard VII) have improved from 71% in 1997 to 79% in 2004 in the Mainland. Retention of girls is noted to be slightly better than that of boys (MPEE, 2006, p. 12).

The above remarkable successes have been mainly due to a supportive government and policy environment. Some of the supportive policy interventions have included:

- Implementation of the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP)
- Recruitment of more teachers is being fast tracked by reduction of years in training and by putting in place accelerated training plans
- Poor families have been provided for, by allowing their children to attend school free of charge
- Expansion of secondary school infrastructure has resulted in increased intake of primary school leavers, adding motivation to staying in the full course of primary schooling.

However, challenges also remain. There is concern about performance of girls in Standard VII (Primary School Leaving) Examinations. Transition rates indicate that Secondary School enrolment is up with a near gender balance at entry. However, after Form IV the retention of girls drops substantially with a ratio of 2 boys to 1 girl when they reach Form VI (ibid). Adult illiteracy also remains high. Overall, about 28.6% of Tanzanians cannot read and write in any language. There is more illiteracy among women (36%) than men (20.4%). Elimination of illiteracy particularly among rural women therefore remains a big challenge.

Education for All in Uganda

Uganda's formal education system comprises of seven years of primary, followed by four years of lower secondary and 2 years of upper secondary. This 7-4-2 pattern is followed by three to five years (3-5) of tertiary education (UG 1992).

Universal Primary Education was initiated by the Government of Uganda in 1997 with the aim of increasing access to quality primary education. The government committed itself to pay school fees, provide textbooks and other instructional materials for pupils and teachers, and to meet the costs of co-

curricular activities, school administration and maintenance. The parents were expected to meet other related expenses such as exercise books, uniform and school meals. Although the UPE policy was initially aimed at four children of school-going age per family, it was revised in 2002 to cover all children of school-going age (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2004).

The introduction of UPE in 1997 led to a substantial increase in primary school enrolments from the pre-UPE total of 3.1 million children in 1996 to 7.2 million children to-date. The current net enrolment ratio stands at 84% making it likely that Uganda will be able to achieve 100% Education for All by 2015 in terms of access. In addition, the gender enrolment gap in primary education has narrowed, with the proportion of girls in total enrolment rising to 49% in 2004 up from 44.2% in 1990.

The above remarkable achievement in education for all provision has been mainly due to strong government commitment in addition to donor support. As noted in UNDP (2006:19), financing of the education sector as a whole increased from 2.1% GDP in 1995 to 4.8% of GDP in 2003/2004. The share of education in the national budget went up from 19% in 1995/96 to 26.8% in 1998/99, before dropping to 18.8% in 2003/2004. Furthermore, the debt cancellation that Uganda benefited from under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief initiatives in 1998 and 2001 enabled the country to establish a Poverty Action Fund (PAF) into which savings made from debt servicing were deposited for the purposes of funding high priority poverty reduction programmes, among which was Universal Primary Education.

However, despite the positive developments in the achievement and sustainability of EFA, there are a number of serious challenges that still remain for Uganda. Some of these are highlighted in UNDP (2006: p.19) and they include:

- Socio-economic and regional disparities. E.g. there are noticeable imbalances in gross enrollment ratios between rural and urban areas. In 2004, about 7% of children aged 6-12 had never attended school (UNDP: 2006: 19), and the majority were in rural areas. Also teachers in primary schools serving in rural areas and hard to reach areas are largely not well trained while others are not trained at all compared to teachers in urban areas, resulting into quality imbalances.
- Armed conflicts in the western and northern regions
- The continued prevalence of poverty
- High dropout and repetition rates. For example, completion rates fluctuated between 48% in 2006 and 60% in 2004 (UNDP, 2006: p.20). This may imply that the investment in primary education has not translated into real gains due to the high dropout rates. Furthermore, the 2005/2006 household survey data shows that for all the pupils who joined Primary One in the year 2000, only 38% reached Primary Seven. Overall, about 1.8 million pupils enrolled in Primary One in 2000, but only 685,000 pupils were estimated to be in Primary Seven in 2006, meaning that the rest dropped out of the school along the way or repeated a grade (ibid: p. 21). Completion rates for secondary education are even worse. Available information shows that

the completion rates for boys and girls in secondary schools were at 28 and 22 per cent respectively in 2004 (ibid: p.21).

- Limited participation of local leaders and communities in the UPE programme, which impacts negatively on its sustainability.

Implications of the EFA Progress

Just as it has been challenging to mobilise sufficient resources to aid the achievement of EFA in all countries, it will equally be challenging to sustain the achievements. While the ultimate responsibility for achieving EFA is with national governments, many countries, as noted in the preceding sections, have to rely on the good will of donors. For so many countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa poverty levels are still very high to help in the achievement of EFA later on to sustain the gains. Although there has been a noted real per capita income growth in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia between 2000 and 2005, and despite the reductions in the number of people living in absolute poverty, there has been rising inequality between rich and poor (UNESCO, 2007: p. 5).

UNESCO (2007: p7-8) further notes that while a majority of governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have increased the financial priority given to education, too many countries continue to allocate very low shares of GNP and total government expenditure to education. Yet government commitment is central to achieving and sustaining EFA. The Global Monitoring Report gives overwhelming evidence that countries making significant progress towards universal enrolment in primary education have tended to increase their education expenditure as a share of GNP, and in countries where the progress has been slower, the share has decreased.

The Socio-Economic and Political Challenges Facing the 4 Case Study Countries

Despite the remarkable economic performance that the four countries have registered in the recent past, they are still faced with several challenges with regard to meeting targets of key economic and social indicators.

Malawi is noted to be one of the least developed countries with a GDP per capita of US\$195.3 (UNDP, 2003: p.1). The Human Development Index (HDI) for Malawi is 0.387, which means that close to two-thirds of the population of 10 million people, 51% of whom are women, still live in poverty. It was estimated in 1998 that 65.3% of the population, representing about 6.3 million people, lived in poverty, and 28.7% of the population lived in extreme poverty (ibid.). There were also massive inequalities between urban and rural areas and between the very rich and poor. Inequality, as measured by the Gini Coefficient, was 0.52 for urban areas and 0.37 for rural areas. The richest 20% of the population consumed 46.3% of the total goods and services available while the poorest 20% consumed only 6.3%.

The poverty situation in Malawi has not changed that much in the past years. For example, according to the recent Integrated Household Survey 2004/05 cited in Government of Malawi (2006: p. xiii), the current status of poverty shows that 52.4% of the population still lives below the poverty line, i.e. about 6.3 million people in Malawi are poor, with the poorest in the Southern Region, and rural areas being

poorer than urban areas (where poverty rates are at 25%). It is estimated that approximately 30% of the poor moved out of poverty during the period, while 30% of the non-poor moved into poverty. This shows a vicious cycle of poverty and a continued economic vulnerability in Malawi.

In the context of **Mozambique**, data from the Household Survey (IAF) of 1996/97 provides a comprehensive country profile of poverty (cited in Republic of Mozambique, 2001: p.1). It is noted that nearly 70% of the population lives in absolute poverty, and there are notable urban-rural and regional imbalances. The main determinants of poverty are highlighted to include i) slow growth of the economy until the beginning of the 1990s ii) low levels of education of working age household members, particularly women iii) high dependency rates in households iv) low productivity in the family agriculture sector v) lack of employment opportunities within and outside the agricultural sector vi) poor infrastructure, especially rural areas.

There have been improvements in the recent years, however. According to UNDP (2008: p.9), Mozambique has over the past few years, experienced average economic growth rates in excess of 7%, with the growth of agricultural, manufacturing industry, trade and transport sectors all playing an important role. The Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA II – 2006-2009) predicted a growth rate of about 6.5% to be achieved in the period 2010-2014. In 2002 and 2003, the National Institute for Statistics (NIS) conducted a comprehensive survey. The results of the survey showed that poverty in Mozambique has been significantly reduced from 69.4% in 1997 to 54.1% in 2003. It is projected that in 2009, the proportion of people living below the national poverty level will be further reduced to 45% and will achieve the 40% Millennium Target in 2015 (UNDP: 2008: p.10). This remarkable economic performance notwithstanding, Mozambique remains one of the worlds' poorest countries – 172nd position in total of 177 countries, the lowest in the Southern African Development Community (UNDP, 2008: p.9). Besides acute material poverty, the poor in Mozambique also suffer a high degree of vulnerability to natural disasters and economic shocks, such as the tragic floods, that afflicted the country in 2000 and 2001 (Republic of Mozambique, 2001: p.1).

Tanzania has witnessed an improved economic performance at the macro-level in recent years (United Republic of Tanzania, 2005: p.1). GDP growth rate rose to 6.2% in 2002. In 2004, there was a remarkable rise to 6.7% GDP growth rate. During the same period, inflation was in control – the annual inflation rate was 4.4% in 2003 compared to 6% in 2000. However, policies are still required to ensure that the pattern of growth is pro-poor and benefits at the macro-level are translated into micro-level welfare outcomes. Poverty and inequality levels are still high, particularly in rural areas where about 87% of the poor population live, and is highest among households who depend on agriculture (ibid. p.2-3).

Another area of concern for Tanzania is that of high rates of unemployment and underemployment (ibid, p.9). Unemployment stands at 2.3 million (1.3 women and 1.0 million men) equivalent to 12.9% of the labour force. Unemployment is worse among the youth, including the educated youth. Furthermore, formal salary/wage employment constitutes a small proportion of total employment in Tanzania (ibid. p.10). The share of formal employment in the public sector has declined and there has also been a drop in the government and parastatal employment from 5.2 to 2.5% of adults. Nevertheless, there has been

a rise in employment in the private sector and self-employment, which are now key activities of 40% of adults in the capital city and 31% in other urban areas.

UNDP's recent report on **Uganda's** progress towards achieving the MDGs (UNDP, 2007: p.4) reveals that the country's average growth rate of about 5.6% over the past five years is below the 7% target required to reduce absolute poverty to below 10% of the population by 2017. The country's GDP per capita was US\$346 and US\$394 in 2005/6 and 2006/7 respectively. Donor dependence remains very high, accounting for over 30% of total government expenditure. It is also estimated that 31% of Uganda's total population live in absolute poverty, the majority of these residing in rural areas.

Strategies for sustainable growth and poverty reduction with long-term implications on EFA sustainability within the 4 countries

All four countries have in place national development plans and policies that are aimed at streamlining strategies for poverty eradication among the population to be able to lead better lives. If achieved, the aims entailed in all the national plans have got the potential of empowering the citizens to be self-reliant and take charge of their own destinies.

Malawi

The Government of Malawi has instituted the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) (2006-2011) as a means to achieve economic growth and wealth creation which are critical for immediate improvement in the economic well-being of Malawians (Government of Malawi, 2006). To this effect, the strategy sets out 6 priority areas including agriculture and good security; irrigation and water development; transport infrastructure development; energy generation and supply; integrated rural development; prevention and management of nutrition disorders, HIV and AIDS. Surprisingly, education is not listed as a key priority, although the strategy acknowledges the need to invest in social development through education, health, good governance and the need to protect the most vulnerable (ibid: p. xii).

As a sustainability measure, the Government of Malawi instituted an Economic Growth Strategy (EGS) that does not require substantial additional spending by Government and instead that could be achieved through refocusing of existing resources by developing a more conducive set of policies that would stimulate private sector investment and trade (ibid, p. xiii).

The Government of Malawi is committed to improving lives of the rural poor through infrastructure development and economic empowerment. This explains the major focus on agriculture and food security as the top-most priority. Agriculture is noted to be the single most important sector of the economy as it employs 80% of the workforce, and contributes over 80% of foreign exchange earnings (Government of Malawi, 2006: p. xv). Unfortunately, agriculture in Malawi is characterised by low and stagnant yields, over dependence on rain-fed farming which increases vulnerability to weather related shocks, low level of irrigation development, and low uptake of improved farm inputs (ibid). Thus, the government's agricultural strategy aims at increasing productivity and agro-processing and manufacturing for both domestic and export markets. This would be facilitated by targeting

infrastructure development to ensure that rural communities are linked to markets and rural cooperatives to lower transaction costs and help communities with collective bargaining, and strengthening the policy environment for micro-finance including improved coordination of donor programmes, among others (ibid., p.xxi)

Mozambique

Mozambique's Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA I) 2001-2005 and PARPA II – 2006-2009 was conceived with the main objective of reducing the incidence of absolute poverty from 70% in 1997 to less than 60% by 2005 and less than 50% by the end of this decade (Republic of Mozambique, 2001: p.1). The plan contains policies aimed at creating a favourable climate for stimulating investment and productivity, and achieving an average annual GDP growth rate of 8% (ibid. p.3). It is a pro-poor strategy that attempts to create a policy climate which stimulates the private sector to accelerate job creation and increase income generating opportunities through self-employment. It takes into account the need for a better regional balance, with special attention to regions with the greatest concentration of poor people.

Accordingly, the country's poverty reduction strategy sets out six priorities including i) education ii) health iii) agriculture and rural development iii) basic infrastructure v) good governance and vi) macro-economic and financial management (Republic of Mozambique, 2001: p.3).

The main objectives in the area of education include achieving universal primary education, expanding secondary education, informal education, and technical-vocational education. The programme also includes a commitment to combat HIV/AIDS through schools.

Agriculture and rural development is a priority of the Mozambique poverty reduction strategy because more than 70% of the population is concentrated in rural areas, and a higher proportion depends on agriculture for survival. In addition, agriculture contributes around 30% of GDP, with most production coming from the family sector, which covers more than 3 million families (ibid, p.4). Thus the agriculture and rural development strategy is geared at increasing income-generation opportunities, especially for the family sector. Success in this would depend on agronomic advances to raise productivity and access to markets. The government hopes to expand production of the agricultural sector with the support of rural extension programmes based on specific crops and technologies.

The agriculture and rural development strategy is supported with a corresponding strategy of development of basic infrastructure (ibid. p.4). Improvements in the road network would permit better access to markets and a reduction in costs, and would facilitate communication and mobility, especially for those who live in rural areas and depend on agriculture.

The government of Mozambique further believes that good governance is a fundamental condition for success in reducing poverty (ibid, p.4). Thus, the strategy is to promote good governance in various forms, including decentralisation and devolution of public administration, to bring government closer to the people; reform of public institutions so that they can better respond to the needs of the people,

starting with the simplification of bureaucratic procedures, as well as strengthening institutions and public servants to be accountable, and elimination of corruption at all levels.

Finally, the poverty reduction strategy for Mozambique sets out some actions in the area of macro-economic and financial management (ibid, p.5). Priorities in this area include i) fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies to maintain low inflation and increase competitiveness of the economy ii) policies to mobilise additional budgetary resources equitably and efficiently iii) policies to improve the management of public expenditure iv) policies to secure and expand financial markets, including a careful analysis of opportunities to expand financial services to rural areas and extend them to small and medium enterprises v) policies to promote international trade vi) policies to strengthen the management of domestic and foreign debt.

Tanzania

Tanzania's poverty reduction strategy is termed the "National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) (United Republic of Tanzania, 2005). Its priority is to institute initiatives geared at supporting rural-oriented sectors in order to empower the rural populations to increase their productive capabilities. The noted challenge is to identify potentials in poorer districts and regions for possible new investments, and through the budget allocations, to improve provisions of infrastructure and social services in the most disadvantaged areas (ibid, p.5).

While agriculture is the leading sector in Tanzania (accounting for 45% of GDP and about 60% of export earnings), it is faced with several constraints such as low productivity of land, labour and production inputs, underdeveloped irrigation potential, limited capital and access to financial services, inadequate agricultural technical support services, poor rural infrastructure hindering effective rural-urban linkages, infestations and outbreaks of crop, animal pests and diseases, erosion of natural resource base and environmental degradation, among others (ibid, p.6). Thus, just as the case with the preceding countries, Tanzania's poverty reduction strategy targets improvements in agricultural productivity as top priority.

Uganda

Uganda's national development plan is known as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) (Republic of Uganda, 2004). The PEAP sets out to achieve 5 broad aims in a bid to address Uganda's development challenges. It aims to i) enable sustainable growth in the incomes of the poor ii) increase productivity and competitiveness of the economy iii) restore security, resolve conflicts and improve regional equity iv) strengthen governance and v) enhance human resource development.

The human development pillar is at the heart of the PEAP. It covers health, education, water and sanitation and aims at delivering a healthy and well educated population as the final outcome (UNDP 2007: p.5). Investments in education are crucial, and the UPE policy is evidence of this commitment. In order to sustain the gains of UPE, Universal Secondary Education was introduced in 2007.

Given the fact that the bulk of the labour force is employed in agriculture (about 82%) the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture [PMA] was conceived by the Government of Uganda (ibid.). The PMA

outlines a series of multi-sectoral interventions aimed at improving agriculture productivity in order to boost output and increase the incomes for the poor. Some of the interventions include:

- Strategic Export Initiative (SEI) which includes providing farmers with high quality planting and stock materials, promoting the production of high value-added quality products through processing and other specialised techniques, and skills development in strategic areas such as textiles and garment production, and information and telecommunications technology (ICT).
- The Medium-term Competitiveness Strategy (MTCS), which is aimed at providing infrastructure, improving access to credit, strengthening the commercial justice sector, promoting business growth and exports, and improving the business environment for small enterprises.
- An integrated approach to support farmers, where groups and organisations are formed or mobilised for purposes of facilitating them through government-supported farm input supply, advisory service delivery, and micro-finance services.

Conclusion: Rethinking EFA provision and sustainability

No doubt all the four countries studied provide varied examples of nations and the international community coming together to provide better livelihoods to the world's poorest. Besides donor support, the four nations have instituted poverty reduction strategies as a means of increasing household incomes in a bid to eliminate poverty and empower the individuals to take charge of their lives in sustainable ways. Many of the poverty reduction strategies are aimed at "achieving the MDGs in order to make life better for all" (Government of Malawi, 2006: p. xii). However there is need to move beyond the MDGs, and lay out strategies for sustaining goals such as Education for All beyond the set date of 2015. In any case, the MDGs are not a once off attainment. As King (2009: p.177) has observed: "It might have been thought that what we might call a sustainable development approach to achieving the MDGs *including education for all* would have been highly appropriate, since it is clear that reaching the MDGs is not a 1-year Olympiad to be celebrated in 2015, but a process that needs eventually to be sustained on local resources". Subsequently, the global financial crisis is a clear signal that "reaching the MDGs on the back of external aid" (King, *ibid.* p.178) is something that cannot be sustained for ever. Developing countries should eventually embark on what Takyi-Amoako (2009: p.1) has termed "an exit strategy out of development aid dependency".

It might as well be more useful to move beyond Education for All and Universal Primary Education for the masses that is largely dependent on external aid, to nurturing systems where countries are able to offer quality education, even to a few individuals, but in sustainable ways. Rather than lobbying for international assistance to put as many children as possible through the primary education system, developing countries should focus on what they can be able to do within their means and also ensure that those who go through the school system link directly to the labour market environment (King, 2009: p.175) and are able contribute to the development of the communities where they live after school. In this way, education will not be for the sake of it or what King, (*ibid*) has termed "Education for what?"

Instead, it will be for the qualitative growth of individuals who are able to impact meaningfully on their local communities and contexts (Sawamura and Sifuna, 2008: p. 117).

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