



Consortium for Research on
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Transitions and Equity

NGO Provision of Basic Education:
Alternative or Complementary
Service Delivery to Support Access to the Excluded?

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Summary

While access to state schooling has grown in many countries in recent years, a hardcore of marginalised children continue to be excluded from this. Some of these children are able to gain access to education through non-state provision. The focus of this paper is on primary school aged children who find access through (international) non-government organisations (NGOs). Based on a review of the available literature, the paper shows that there have been fluctuations in attention paid to NGO provision by education researchers since the 1970s. Changes are due in part to the prevailing political and economic environment, as well as to pressure placed on international agencies and national governments to reach education targets. The paper also shows that there has been a shift in the priorities of these providers over this period, from seeing themselves as supporting a parallel, alternative system of education independent of the state system, towards one aimed at being complementary to the state system, with the intention of ultimately supporting children's access to a state-provided education.

The paper highlights that much of the available literature suggests that NGO provision often intends to bring benefits in terms of the alternative forms of pedagogy and accountability it aims to offer. However, as the paper indicates, there is very little systematic, critical analysis of who is gaining access to education offered by alternative providers, or what they are actually getting access to. As such, there is a need for analysis of educational access to pay greater attention to diverse forms of access – both in terms of who provides, and what is provided. Moreover, changes in priorities associated with the effects of the international economic and political agenda, along with the intention of integrating multiple providers of education into a system-wide approach, give rise to the need for an analysis of the implications for NGO-government collaboration to ensure sustainability of educational access to those who would otherwise be excluded.

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