



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational Access in South Africa

Country Analytic Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is concerned with understanding educational access for children between the ages of 5 and 15 years in four countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, India and South Africa.

CREATE understands educational access more broadly than simple physical access to school. True access includes equitable access to education that is meaningful.

- Meaningful access to education requires more than full enrolment; it requires high attendance rates, progression through grades with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered.

Education will add more value to people's lives when their freedom to choose is enhanced by meaningful access.

Until most learners are able to progress consistently from grade to grade, without a jolting stop-start journey or frequent repetition, it will remain of the utmost importance to clarify the scale and distribution of exclusion, delayed access, multiple access and chronic absenteeism. Exclusion includes those who are in the vulnerable zone of the silently excluded – those who are physically present in classes but who do not learn anything meaningful or gain the requisite skills. Such lack of epistemic access could be the result of individual learning barriers, lack of concentration because of hunger or because the quality of teaching is poor. This *Review* also considers factors such as negative schooling experiences, HIV/AIDS, sexual harassment, racism and xenophobia as contributing to repetition, absenteeism, low achievement and drop-out.

Educational access is examined in this *Review* in terms of a model that describes seven zones of exclusion. Zone 0 is Grade R, the (as yet non-compulsory) entry point for learners aged 5 years (or turning 5 before the end of June) into the schooling system. Zone 1 includes children who have never gone to school. The second zone includes those who drop out before the end of primary education (Grade 7), and Zone 3 contains learners who are at risk of dropping out in this same period. Zone 4 is the transition between Grades 7 and 8, or between primary and secondary school. Zone 5 contains those learners who drop-out of Grades 8 or 9 and Zone 6 refers to young people of any age who are at risk of exclusion in these two years of lower secondary school.

This *Review* describes and explains patterns of access to schools in South Africa according to these zones of exclusion. It outlines policy and legislation on access to education and provides a statistical analysis of the seven zones of access, vulnerability and exclusion. The quantitative data is supported by a review of research which explains the patterns of access and exclusion. The *Review* also analyses the way in which

educational access is conceptualised, and identifies gaps in these accounts which suggest areas for future research.

The policy context

Under apartheid, significant numbers of children went to school, especially in the primary grades, but Bantu Education also severely limited the quality of education, and the apartheid regime consistently under-resourced black schools. During the 1980s, however, there was considerable expansion of secondary schools for black learners.

- In 1994, South Africa was able to provide near universal access to basic education, but in a system fractured by racial inequality and offering poor quality for the majority of learners.

Following from the 1996 Constitution, compulsory education extended from Grades 1 to 9, or from ages 6 to 15. This period of basic education is also referred to as the General Education and Training (GET) phase and covers seven years of primary school and two years in secondary school. The final three years of secondary school are not compulsory but government is constitutionally obliged to make this Further Education and Training (FET) phase progressively available. Learners can acquire a FET qualification by completing Grade 12 in the schooling system or attaining an equivalent certification from one of 50 public FET colleges or through opportunities offered by the private sector. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) offers an alternative route to both GET and FET qualifications, especially for young people and adults older than the 15-year compulsory age limit.

Responsibility for schooling (GET and FET) is concurrent between national and provincial government. The national Department of Education takes the lead on developing national norms and standards and creates the main policy and legislative frameworks, while provinces take executive responsibility and make the funding decisions. Access differentials can therefore be studied between and within the nine provinces. Provision of schooling is mainly public, with independent schools accommodating under 4% of learners in Grades 1 to 9 in 2004.

Post-apartheid education policy was informed by its commitment to the fundamental right of all citizens to education, equity, redress, and the improvement of quality. New policies were designed to create an inclusive and efficient system. Attention was given to ensuring access of marginalised learners, children infected with HIV/AIDS and learners with special educational needs (LSEN). A progressive outcomes based curriculum was introduced, as well as measures to monitor educational quality. Education governance was devolved to schools, among other things permitting School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to charge fees, with significant implications for educational access (see below). The policy on LSEN emphasizes mainstreaming of learners with mild learning disabilities into ordinary schools. The reception year, Grade R (for children aged 4 turning 5) is being implemented and the target is to reach full coverage of Grade R by

2010. Pro-poor finance policies, school fee exemptions and, most recently, fee-free schools assisted indigent learners into classes. But while policy hoped to net all children in realising their Constitutional right to education, it also aimed to create a more efficient system by regulating repetition and applying age-grade norms in order to minimise under-age and over-age learners.

Financing equitable access to education

Education has consistently enjoyed the largest share of the state budget. Expenditure has increased from R31.1 billion in 1995 to R59.6 billion in 2002, though in real terms it declined as a share of both total government expenditure (from 19.2% in 1996 to 18.8% in 2002) and Gross Domestic Product (from 5.7% in 1996 to 4.9% in 2002). Per capita learner expenditure in post-apartheid education has increased and levelled off between the race groups.

- In 1993, R5500 was spent on each white learner and R1700 on each black learner. By 2005, an average of R4930 was being spent on every learner by the state.

Nevertheless, policy implementation has been constrained by the scale of the historic backlogs inherited from apartheid and the effects of inflation on education costs. Expenditure has also prioritised public ordinary schools, with the effect of crowding out spending on other services like Inclusive Education, Early Childhood Development and Adult Basic Education.

Some headway towards equalization was achieved through efforts at educator redistribution (post-provisioning), where many educators in previously advantaged schools were given the option to teach at previously disadvantaged schools or apply for early retirement. However, this also resulted in large numbers of highly qualified educators leaving the profession.

Partly as a result of the financial pressures, the South African Schools Act (1996) allowed for School Governing Bodies to raise additional capital, among other measures by charging fees. One of the intended outcomes of charging school fees was to encourage children from middle class families to stay in public schools because those schools were able to hire additional educators, and acquire other features that enhanced the provision of quality education. But fees act as a barrier to school access and they allowed for vast differentials to continue between schools because wealthier communities could raise substantially more funds than poor schools.

Equity mechanisms, therefore, sought to redistribute state funding towards the poorest schools. The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF), which took effect on 1 January 2000 (DoE, 1998a), dealt with public funding of schools, exemption of parents who were unable to pay school fees, and subsidies to independent schools. It required each provincial education department to rank all its schools from 'poorest' to 'least poor', and then to allocate funding for non-personnel purposes progressively. The

NNSSF required that 60% of the available funds be allocated to the poorest 40% of schools.

However, this policy has had a marginal impact on schools for two reasons: first, since the poorest schools did not have the financial capacity to handle large sums of money, the provincial Department of Education sent them a paper budget. Poor schools had to requisition their requirements from the provincial Department, which, however, failed to supply these schools yet continued to pay for services (such as electricity, water, photocopying, gardening and scholar transport) to the least poor schools, eventually exhausting the budget. Meanwhile, schools in the least poor quintiles continue to compensate for reduced funding by charging higher school fees, thus maintaining existing differentials.

Technical targeting processes are no doubt important but it became clear that they were not sufficient to eliminate the deep structural disparities in South African education provision. Because of the substantial economic differences among provinces, better off schools in one province could receive more state funding than the poorest schools in another. The resource targeting system was designed to address intra-provincial inequities but could not take account of inequalities among provinces which resulted in different funding allocations to the same quintiles in different provinces. To address these concerns, the NNSSF was completely overhauled in 2006 and a national poverty ranking model was put in place.

Patterns of exclusion

Access to basic education in South Africa is expansive when compared with other developing countries.

- Age-specific school enrolment rates for 6 to 15 year olds in South Africa stand at over 95%.

However, lower Net Enrolment Rates – 87.4% for primary schools in 2004 – suggest that learners are not in the correct grade for their age (most likely they are over-age).

Almost all school-age children enrol in schools, with just under 2% of learners never entering a school. Zone 1 is, therefore, statistically less of a concern than the other zones of exclusion. Most learners stay in school through to the end of primary school, with 88% of learners completing Grade 7 in 2003. This figure does not take into account repetition and drop-out in Zone 2 which is calculated in this *Review* to average 4%.

Zone 4 refers to the transition from primary to secondary school. The 2004 data shows that 90% of learners moved from Grade 7 to Grade 8 for the last two years of compulsory education. The data suggests that there has been significant improvement in the completion rate of basic education between 1997 and 2003, with an increase from 78% in 1997 to 92% in 2003 in Zone 5. Beyond CREATE's zones of exclusion lie the post-

compulsory, final three years of secondary school, which many young people battle to complete.

Zone 3 (Grades 1-7) and Zone 6 (Grades 8 and 9) include learners who are at risk of dropping out. These zones of exclusion are characterised by a range of endogenous and exogenous factors which limit learners' abilities to contend with schooling.

- Exogenous excluding factors include poverty, rates of orphanhood, the environment in which schooling takes place and the impact of HIV/AIDS.
- Endogenous excluding factors include erratic attendance, overage enrolment and repetition.

These zones are also zones of silent exclusion, affecting learners who are present in class but under-achieving.

Zones 3 and 6 are difficult to quantify, though the following statistics reveal the scope of the problem and point to these zones as the most important for further research:

- In the national Department of Education's systemic evaluation of Grade 6 learners obtained a national mean score of 38% in Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), 27% in Mathematics, and 41% in Natural Sciences.
- 32.8% of households received a government grant in 2003 based on poverty.
- 22% of children (aged 0 to 19) eligible to receive the Child Support Grant are not receiving the grant.
- 7% of children are always or often hungry and just over 17% of children are sometimes hungry.
- The impact of HIV/AIDS is evident in the growing number of orphans. In 2003, 17.4% of children had lost one parent and 3% of children had lost both parents (371 000 children).

The causes behind exclusion

South Africa's enrolment rate is high even in circumstances where households have experienced economic or social stress. There is little evidence in the South African context that child labour disrupts enrolment in school (though it may nonetheless impact on performance), despite the fact that child labour is widespread in the country. Neither is there a Cinderella effect on the schooling of fostered children: fostered children are just as likely as the blood-related children of a household to be in school, though they may be behind in terms of their age. HIV/AIDS seems to have a greater impact on the school attendance of older teenagers rather than younger children. There appears to be a routine of school going in South Africa which may even provide a measure of stability for households in times of crisis.

However, while enrolment is high, vulnerability to drop-out or silent exclusion is a major problem (Zones 3 and 6). The quality of education for the majority of learners is still substandard and, pressurised by poverty and illness (which is not limited to HIV/AIDS), many are susceptible to dropping-out. Protracted poverty appears to be the most important reason for learners being out of school. The depth of poverty – in terms of material deprivation, social isolation and their psychological consequences – distinguished the children who were not in school from their peers in the same poor community.

Difficulties in paying school fees should be alleviated as the fee-free school policy is implemented in the poorest schools, but the costs of transport, school uniforms, books and stationery add extra burdens to already-stretched household budgets.

- Among the costs of schooling, transport expenses are the single greatest impediment to educational access for those who do not walk to school.

A number of studies have gauged that cash transfers to poor families, such as the Child Support Grant, have a positive effect on enrolment, especially in ensuring learners begin Grade 1 at the appropriate age.

The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic affects both supply (because teachers are affected) and demand for education. HIV prevalence amongst children aged 2 to 18 years is approximately 5.4%. The safety nets provided by extended families and community networks, as well as the potential support given by schools, may prove crucial in enabling affected children to stay in school.

Schools themselves play a big role in encouraging or discouraging access. Many learners who have structural access to schooling do not have ‘epistemic access’, or access to the content knowledge and skills needed to reach the required levels of achievement and competency.

- All learners in South Africa, and especially those in township and rural schools, are not competitive in comparison with international levels of achievement.
- Learners in Foundation Phase classes are unable to read and write adequately, and their educators are unable to adequately teach how to do so.
- Educators spend too little time at school, and, when at school, spend too much time on administrative tasks.

Racism, sexism, bullying and xenophobia contribute to unwelcoming conditions in schools. Given apartheid’s legacy, the problem of racial integration in schools has received a great deal of attention – although proportionately multi-racial schools are a minority. While schools are no longer allowed to discriminate on the basis of race, a number of exclusionary devices have limited access to comparatively better resourced ex-whites-only schools: their geographic location, far from where most black learners live; their high fees; and their often unwelcoming cultural ethos.

The gender of learners has a direct impact on educational access and performance. Patriarchal male attitudes and behaviour towards schoolgirls is a matter of serious concern, with girls frequently encountering rape, abuse, harassment and assault by male classmates and educators. There are more girls than boys in the system from Grades 6 to 12, and girls are less likely than boys to regard education as irrelevant. Pregnancy is an important factor in schoolgirls dropping out.

Poor performance or silent exclusion may be a result of learning disabilities – though this is likely to affect a small minority of children. While policy emphasises mainstreaming children with learning barriers into ordinary schools, no additional financing has been allocated to support this, so children with learning barriers do not receive the necessary support.

Parents and guardians are not always able to provide the necessary background and knowledge of schooling to support their children – and this may provide at least one clue to why many learners fail and repeat. Correlations between mothers' and children's educational levels are really only significant if mothers have been substantially schooled. Not unexpectedly, educated parents are more likely to provide support for learning and to send their children to better schools.

Individual learners' and parents' assessment of the relevance of education is a key motivating influence in continued attendance at school.

- After fees, the most important reason why learners remain out of school is their perception that it is useless or uninteresting: almost 10% of learners overall, and more boys than girls (13.5% as against 6.5%), hold this depressing view of the value of education.

Researchers appear undecided about how much schooling is required before high rates of return, in the form of expected improved earnings, can be said to be probable, with some suggesting that the economic rewards for completing only basic education are negligible.

Future research

The conclusion to this *Review* of educational access in South Africa suggests several possible areas for future research:

- National averages provide an overall picture of educational access, but the reliability and validity of available statistics is debateable, and their interpretation is made difficult by learners repeating grades, transferring between schools, and enrolling late, by schools inflating numbers, and by regional and local disparities.

Closer scrutiny of the statistics, further analysis of secondary data, and district-scale statistics, would help provide a disaggregated picture of which sub-populations experience high drop-out rates and repetition, where they are located

geographically, and at which points in their school career learners are most likely to drop out.

- The specific relationships between, and the order of priority of, the explanatory variables identified here as hindering access to schools are still unclear. What is the particular mix of factors that eventually result in a learner dropping-out? What are the historical precedents in the process to dropping-out? What factors push learners out of schools, and what factors in the home and community act to pull them out?

More answers to these questions could be provided through community-school surveys, examining the interaction between households and schools, tracking both those learners who are out of school and those who are vulnerable to dropping out because they are over-age or performing poorly or frequently absent. A better understanding of what happens in classrooms – and the impact of learner and educator absenteeism – could also be gleaned.

- Further research on the impact of the following recent policies on access would be useful:
 - Progression, repetition and age-grade norms;
 - The introduction of Grade R;
 - The Department of Education's (2003b) plan of action, *Improving Access to Free and Quality Basic Education for All*, which aims to contain uniform and transport costs; and
 - The introduction of fee-free schooling;
 - Finally, studies need to be undertaken of particular sub-groups of excluded children, such as those who lack access to ECD, those in HIV/AIDS-affected households, those in detention or on the streets, those who live far from schools, immigrants, those who become pregnant and those who are victims of violence or discrimination.