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*Effective Schooling
In Rural Africa*

**Project Report 1
Review of Phase I of the Program: March-August 2000**

*Effective Schools and Teachers, Basic Education Cluster
In partnership with the Africa Region*

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Effective Schooling in Rural Africa
Project Reports

Report 1: Review of Phase 1 of the Program

**Report 2: Key Issues Concerning School Effectiveness
and Improvement**

Report 3: Case Study Briefs on Rural Schooling

**Report 4: Frequently Asked Questions about Effective
Schooling in Rural Communities**

Contents of the Report

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Background, aims and objectives.....	2-3
3. An information base for quality schooling in rural Africa.....	4-11
- The context of schooling in rural Africa.....	4-5
- Features of good schooling – voices and perceptions.....	5-6
- Issues affecting the quality of basic education.....	6-7
- The use of knowledge in the school improvement process...	7-9
- The change process and the role of agencies with it.....	10-11
Annex I Working Group Meeting (Copthorne): key objectives, participants and organizations represented.....	12

Effective Schooling in Rural Africa

1. Introduction to the Report

This report summarizes the key developments to date from the program *Effective Schooling In Rural Africa*. The program focuses on quality improvement and is based on a recognition that the World Bank is only one of many who are concerned about these issues, or who can contribute to the dialogue. Expertise lies with educators from many parts of Africa, as well as with the many organizations and agencies who are engaged in supporting educational change and improvement. focuses on improving the quality of schooling in Africa.

The report explains the background to the program which began in March 2000 and its core objectives. It focuses, in particular, on the outcomes from a multi-agency working group meeting held in the UK in May-June 2000 which involved a range of organizations and agencies. Details of the working group meeting, including names of the participants and the organizations and agencies which they represent are provided in Annex 1. In preparation for this meeting, a range of documentary materials were produced. These included *Project Report 2: Key Issues Related to School effectiveness and Improvement* (which draws on the research literature to identify the features of successful schools and teacher improvement projects) and *Project Report 3: Case Study Briefs on Rural Communities*. Fifteen case studies were initially developed, these have now been revised and expanded to twenty.

The case studies focus on schools and the local communities, as well as the impact of systemic reforms. They illuminate issues of access, equity, quality, as well as political commitment and system capacity. Some of the studies have been 'show-cased' for their success in improving student achievement, while others have been included to illustrate why and how good ideas sometimes fail. They are intended to provide policy-makers, practitioners, project managers and planning officials with a range of ideas which may help them to reflect on their own experience. To complement this documentation an additional report, *Frequently Asked Questions about Effective Schooling in Rural Communities* (Project Report 4) has also been produced.

Many people have contributed their time energy and thought to the challenging issues which are the focus of this report. The authors would like to thank all concerned.

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2. Background, Aims and Objectives

Dakar 2000 highlighted the importance of quality, part of a recognition that education expansion will need to be promoted through a focus on quality improvement. Developing an understanding of the shape and nature of success is a critical element in achieving this quality improvement. Equally important is the recognition that change and improvement depend on the will, capacity and actions of many players at different levels in an education system.

The program *Effective Schooling In Rural Africa* was developed by the 'Effective Schools and Teachers Thematic Group' (now part of the Basic Education Cluster) of the World Bank in response to concerns from the Bank's Africa Region about poor quality schooling, particularly in rural Africa. There are of course, considerable variations across the continent. A number of countries have failed to increase enrolment (and some have seen a decline over the last ten years), others have attracted many more students to school. However, the gains in enrolment have not necessarily been matched by improvements in the quality of provision. Low quality in its turn reduces the demand for basic education, particularly in rural communities. The program aims to:

- Generate greater consensus among agencies and client governments about how to develop and promote more effective schooling in rural Africa (to be achieved by synthesizing current evidence relevant to effective schooling in rural Africa);
- Initiate and support *critical discussion* on school effectiveness issues for rural Africa;
- Enhance the ability of staff from client governments, development agencies and the World Bank, to support changes (at both school and system levels) which will promote school improvement.

The program was sparked off by a range of concerns, including the inappropriateness to rural African contexts of models of schooling which typically assume, 'six classrooms, with six well-trained teachers, 1000 hours of instruction, uniform ages and students who are never absent and who are fluent in the language of instruction'. There are also concerns that, while much has been written about education and schooling in rural settings, the evidential basis for this is often uncertain and needs to be strengthened in order to support the dialogue between governments and agencies. Conflicting opinions and divergent priorities among development agencies about the best ways of improving schooling in rural areas serve to compound the problems.

An additional concern is that descriptions of schooling in Africa usually depict a deficit model of schooling - inadequate teachers, poor institutional capacity, and seemingly intractable socioeconomic, political and environmental factors. Although this analysis is accurate, it is a limited and limiting portrayal which reinforces a view that little can be done, or is being done. There are successes, schools and learners succeeding against the odds, but these successes are often hidden, or the evidential basis which supports them is weak.

The program was planned around a series of activities:

- A working group meeting bringing together practitioners and agency staff to distill key messages about school improvement in rural Africa held in June 2000;
- A follow-on workshop in Washington which would focus on:

- Key messages from the program;

- Data and analysis mapped against questions asked by task managers and others in the field;
- Views from task managers about ways in which the knowledge generated could support policy dialogue;
- Support for multi-national and national seminars held in Africa, which bring together governments, practitioners and agencies, to support the development of school improvement;
- A possible study tour to complement the seminar program.

The first phase of the program, *Effective Schooling in Rural Africa* involved drawing together international experience on issues relevant to effective schooling. The objective was to generate an overview of the issues facing basic education provision in rural Africa, as well as to elicit some of the success stories which demonstrate that it is possible to have effective teaching and learning, despite the obstacles which poor rural environments present. In this report we have drawn on the working group meeting, and subsequent work, to provide some key elements of the information base for quality education in rural Africa. Our analysis is presented under the following themes:

- The context of schooling in rural Africa: what are the key aspects of the life of a child growing up in rural communities in Africa which impact on her or his school experience?
- The characteristics of good schooling: what does a good school look like to a student, to a parent, to a teacher or an inspector? What are the recurrent themes and what are the different emphases? Is it possible to identify general messages?
- Key issues for school improvement: what are the main areas of concern for which education advisors and policy-makers are seeking answers and insights?
- Agencies and advocates: what boundaries shape their role and what strengths do they bring to the development process?
- Knowledge and information: what kinds of knowledge is needed, for what kinds of uses and with what possible outcomes?

3. An Information Base for Quality Schooling in Rural Africa

The context of schooling in rural Africa

The challenges which confront Africa are acute. For many children, quality is poor and relevance limited. Low student enrolment and high drop-out are endemic and a range of school-related factors (such as the costs and location of schools), as well as external factors (such as poverty, attitudes about gender, conflict and ill-health) combine to reduce access to learning. The spread of HIV/AIDS is having a profound impact on education, depleting an already limited teaching force and generating social upheaval. Although *Education for All* has brought children to school who had previously been excluded – girls, the poor, the disadvantaged – attendance at school has not in itself been a guarantee of access to learning. Lack of connection between schools and communities; limited teaching styles; materials and approaches which fail to accommodate mother tongues; strategies which do not recognize that, for many children, schooling is not a continuous but a fragmented process, all combine to limit the impact of schooling. The effectiveness of schooling in rural communities is further reduced by resource inequities and the unwillingness of teachers to be stationed in remote areas.

Participants at the working group meeting were asked to complete a pre-meeting questionnaire on the features of rural Africa; the key elements of effective schooling in a rural Africa; and the approaches and initiatives which appear to be most promising in improving rural schooling. These submissions, enriched by discussions throughout the course of the workshop, served to generate an audit of the context for learning.

The factors which were seen as characterizing the different environment in rural Africa include: dispersed populations, displaced populations (following conflict), situations of on-going conflict, nomadic populations, limited basic infrastructure, endemic malnutrition among children, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and high levels of child labor in agriculture. The consequences of these factors for student learning are that:

- *Schooling is an interrupted process:* The demand for labor from school age children, their poor health, the difficulties associated with getting to school and the limited benefits accrued from being at school all conspire to reduce demand for, and increase the obstacles to schooling. The result is that children often attend school irregularly.
- *The conditions of schooling and the nature of students' lives in rural areas act to reduce students' readiness to learn:* Long journeys on foot to school, students' poor nutrition, poor or non-existent sanitation at schools, uncomfortable and even harmful conditions within classrooms all act to reduce students' capacity to learn.
- *Teaching is often of poor quality and is poorly supported:* Isolated conditions in rural areas fail to attract high quality teachers. This situation is made worse by the fact that poor infrastructure obstructs support from advisory agencies. Not only are teachers served less well by support services, they often have fewer text and other teaching resources.
- *Formal schooling often fails to connect with the needs of rural communities:* The curriculum often has little relevance to rural life, community involvement is mixed, and low levels of literacy in the community and traditional attitudes and practices provide little support for the

learning students' receive in school. Furthermore, formal schooling is sometimes at odds with prevailing religious or cultural practices.

- *Rural education is often not an immediate priority for governments:* Owing to the remote nature of rural schools, governments give less weight to issues of low quality education in rural areas than to similar issues in urban schools.

While these points indicate some of the generic areas of concern for rural schools, there are (as indicated earlier in the report) potential dangers with this type of categorization. Such an approach fails to capture the context specific nature of local priorities: rural communities are not always widely dispersed, and there are certainly examples of strong community involvement in schools in some parts of rural Africa. In addition it serves to reinforce the deficit view of current education provision in rural settings which in its turn can act to both lower expectations, induce a sense of despair and reduce the enthusiasm of those working with schools in rural areas. It also fails to capture the possible benefits of alternative practices which have led to improvements in schooling.

Features of good schooling – voices and perceptions

Notions of what constitute a 'good' school are bound in culture and content and change over time. How the features are played out is shaped by context. Stake-holders may hold differing views about what a 'good' school is but there are some fundamental features which emerge across a range of contexts. To take one example, when students in contexts as diverse as the UK, Uzbekistan, Thailand and South Africa were asked their views of what makes a good school, they all agreed on three key elements:

- ◆ Good teacher-pupil relationships;
- ◆ Support for learning difficulties;
- ◆ Good communications with parents.

Assumptions about what make a good school underpin all efforts for school improvement. In order to explore these assumptions about, participants in the working group were asked to give their perceptions about the pertinent features of good schooling in rural Africa from the perspectives of three categories of stake holders: communities, teachers and district education officers.

From the *community perspective*, access for all and safety (within and en route to school) both feature as pre-requisites for good schooling. Features of good schooling include qualified (local) teachers and a school environment which supports learning. Evidence of this should be found in good exam grades, which in turn provide access to the next level of education. While these features accord with standard conceptions of a quality formal education, close relations between the school and the community were also felt to be important features of a good schooling. Such relations should be reflected in a curriculum which connects the home with school knowledge, and which is sensitive to local religious and cultural beliefs. The administration should also be accountable to the community. Ideally, the school should be seen as a resource for the community to draw upon. However, with this, as with all other aspects of good schooling, it was noted that communities are not homogenous and that drawing general conclusions about community perceptions needs to be undertaken with care.

From the *teachers' perspective* a successful school is one which is strong on exam performance: a view shared by the community. However, teachers' immediate priorities are usually closely related to the demands made of them, and the rewards they receive. Top of the list is pay, especially in countries where pay is often received late or is insufficient to meet basic needs. From the teachers' perspective a good school is one where the prescribed curriculum is realistic; where classes are of a reasonable size (with well behaved, regularly attending and motivated students); and where they receive support for their work (in the form of teaching materials and advice). Working relationships within schools also have an immediate impact on their working lives. Strong collegiality, impartiality and the absence of corruption from school management all add to teachers' sense of what makes a good school. Recognition of achievement, coupled with opportunities to progress professionally and progress within the system is also key.

From an *administrative or inspectorate perspective*, once again good grades are a signal of successful schools. In addition other important indicators may include strong working relationships, extra-curricula activities and school's involvement in the community. Other indicators would include good attendance of pupils, an orderly and well managed school environment and a safe environment which meets national standards.

The exercise demonstrated several key issues. Firstly, that while high performance in examinations might be considered to be an important indicator of effectiveness by many stakeholders, different groups give different weight to particular aspects of schooling. The second related issue is that initiatives aimed at improving schooling need to take into account the views and aspirations of these different groups and to recognize the demands of different contexts and cultures. In order for this to happen, education planners and providers need to ensure that communities are consulted and involved in local schooling.

Issues affecting the quality of basic education

The validity of addressing questions of school effectiveness/school improvement through an 'issues' based approach came under scrutiny at the working group meeting. Concerns were voiced that there are dangers associated with an issues-based approach since:

- The problems of quality in rural education are complex and interconnected. Information which is presented in an issues based format may lead to attempts at 'quick fixes' for isolated aspects of an education system. Working on specific issues without taking into account the impact of those changes on the rest of the system, or the cost implications for investments in the rest of the system, can lead to distortions in the sector.
- Such an approach often fails to capture the full implications of the social/political/cultural context of educational change, and consequently may fail to provide the type of information required to design reform programs.
- Similarly, a myopic over emphasis on school-based issues can lead to the neglect of crucial cross-sectoral issues and a lack of understanding of the importance of the broader environment for students' learning.

Although education development needs to be guided by whole sector strategies, and innovations generally address specific problems (such as teacher recruitment), nevertheless, a deeper understanding of these specific issues can contribute to the process of change and

improvement. Participants at the working group meeting identified their key areas of concern, as well as the extent to which more information was needed about them. Table 1 provides an overview of those priority issues, gained through written submissions, as well as through discussion. It also indicates the extent to which knowledge and information seems available, and where there appear to be gaps.

In following up on this area, the development team has recast these issues in the form of frequently asked questions. These questions are reported in *Project Report 4: Frequently Asked Questions about Effective Schooling in Rural Communities* and are presented in ways which we hope will enable those involved in country-based reforms to relate the responses to local contexts and challenges.

The use of knowledge in the school improvement process

Prior to the working group meeting, three forms of information had been compiled: case study briefs; a compilation of issues shaping the context for teaching and learning; and a summary of key issues from the research literature on school effectiveness and school improvement. Whilst it was recognized that each of these forms of knowledge could be useful for school improvement, more work could be and perhaps needs to be done on how the nature and ownership of information influences the use to which it is put.

One of the main topics of discussion at the working group meeting was how knowledge can be used in the process of constructing and implementing programs which lead to school improvement. At the most fundamental level of this process is the formulation of sector strategies. Knowledge of the current state of the local system, as well as information about experiences in other countries ought to provide guidance about education reform programs. Similarly, the development of policy and implementation plans for specific parts of the system should capitalize on available information. However, participants at the working group meeting noted that questions of *knowledge use* cannot be dissociated from the issue of *knowledge ownership*. Moreover, the political nature of educational change means that there is much more to ensuring that educational practitioners engage with knowledge than merely making it available.

The question of ownership of knowledge emerges, in particular, in relation to the issue of garnering political will. In countries where significant blocks to quality improvement lie in the absence of, or variability in political commitment, knowledge which is handed to governments

Table 1: Priority Issues and Knowledge Gaps

Table I Priority Issues	Knowledge Gaps
<p>Teacher Performance/Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and deployment in rural working conditions (isolation, limited resources...), incentives for job satisfaction, improving the numbers of female teachers • Classroom teaching strategies for: large classes, multi-grade, varied abilities and learning styles, refugee camp classrooms, irregularly attending students (nomadic communities) • Initial preparation and ongoing professional development: special preparation for rural teachers • Teacher manuals and use of materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information with a specific rural African context • Successful initial training programs for teachers going to rural postings • Teaching strategies for nomadic communities, large class sizes and refugee situations • The what and how of increasing the supply of female teachers in rural areas
<p>Getting Accurate Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student performance data (systemic assessment and evaluation data) • Qualitative data on activities within classrooms/ schools (with a contextual analysis) • Good quality information about innovative activities in schools and programs for support through the education system as a whole. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on different types of 'measuring' instruments and explanations of how to use both at classroom, school and system levels
<p>Processes involved in School Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community action in school development • Methods for ensuring the participation of various stakeholders • The process of building political will • The process (and sequence) of building capacity throughout the system • The place of coaching/mentoring/support assistance in developing capacity to implement/design reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on HOW various innovations were developed at various levels of the education system and community, with key steps highlighted • Well documented examples of community driven school improvement projects
<p>Relevance of Learning and Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the concept of school to the broader learning environment • Defining the goals for learning for children in rural communities • Meeting community expectations for value of learning • The link between the curriculum and employment. • Balance between national curriculum guidelines/local needs/ responsive to student needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical information which goes beyond the philosophical debates concerning the nature of the curriculum and which documents the extent of the success of rural education programs
<p>Effective Support from the Education System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete measures to reduce dropout and repetition, especially for girls • The role of 'inspectors', how to engage them in being supportive to the teaching/learning process • How to strengthen headteacher skills and support • Creating flexible schedules and use of resources to respond to different rural community needs e.g. harvests • The form and content for basic instructional materials • Mainstreaming girls education issues • Which language of instruction? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study information on the what and how of implementation, together with information about who and the impact ... in context.
<p>Parent and Community Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that students come to school healthy and ready to learn • Importance of early childhood preparation as part of basic education • Helping communities meet the cost of schooling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research guidelines available in these areas • More case studies about what, how, who, impact etc. (particularly in varied rural learning contexts) would be helpful
<p>Health Links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV/AIDS crisis and its impact on education (teacher shortages, children affected from as young as babies, link with women's reproductive health issues, curriculum...) • Need for greater links between health and education programs • Latrines and hygienic conditions at schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for information which focuses on rural communities to highlight possible actions • Lack of comprehensive knowledge of impact of 'HIV/AIDS on education' (need for case studies, clearinghouse of information, examination of what is being done by donors and governments)

from outside sources may have less impact than knowledge which is linked to an 'in-country' advocacy process. Even when knowledge is not being used to advocate specific measures, the extent to which information follows from a felt need from those who are driving the reform process has a significant influence on the degree to which that knowledge is engaged with. Thus a second aspect of knowledge management which needs to be addressed in any program is helping governments determine their knowledge needs.

The issues to do with the ways knowledge is generated and used are complex. There are diverse views about the types of knowledge which are needed; the extent to which knowledge needs to be generated within country, and the ways in which it can be used in policy dialogue. These stem from a range of factors, including differing organizational goals. There was common agreement, however, from the organizations and agencies represented at the working group meeting that the failure to create change and improvement does not only stem from a lack of knowledge, but also from a failure to utilize existing knowledge effectively, and to ensure that governments engage with existing knowledge. A central recommendation which emerged from this debate at the working group meeting was that a key feature of the program *Effective Schooling in Rural Africa* should be to explore the ways in which information is presented so that it has maximum impact.

The 'knowledge' debate raises critical questions about: *what kinds of knowledge are needed, for what kinds of audience, and at what stages in the change process.* Different organizations and agencies will have different requirements. The knowledge base to support the aspirations outlined in *A Chance to Learn: Knowledge and Finance for Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (World Bank 2000) would be strengthened by guidelines on particular topics (such as language policy for early years literacy) which also recognize the country-specific nature of such issues. Project Report 3: *Case Study Briefs on Rural Schooling* and Report 4: *Frequently Asked Questions about Effective Schooling in Rural Communities* will be helpful here.

Detailed and well presented case studies, across a range of countries, which are based on sound evidence and presented in ways which will enable policy-makers and practitioners to reflect on their own experiences are also needed. Again *Case Study Briefs on Rural Schooling* will make a contribution here. The research and development team has also made two complementary research and development proposals to DFID:

- *Case studies of good schooling in rural Africa:* a project which will identify the features of good schooling in a variety of contexts in Africa, and the strategies and approaches – at school, local and national levels - which support this;
- *Pathways into Teaching:* a project which will identify the most cost effective ways of training and developing teachers in Africa and elsewhere.

The change process and the role of agencies within it

The working group meeting drew out some main messages about the process of change and the ways in which the agencies, working in partnership, can help improve schooling in rural Africa. The workshop also clarified the types of knowledge which would be useful in the change process, and the ways in which that knowledge might be put to best use.

A number of key messages emerged about the process of change. These include a recognition that educational change is a political processes and that developing a knowledge base to facilitate improvements in rural schooling must respond to this. A second key message is that all agents (governments and agencies) must be encouraged to contextualise their knowledge needs. Effective utilization of knowledge is dependent on an understanding of the partnerships between the state and civil society. It raises questions about the types of consensus which need to be developed among all the actors at the local level and where possible among the donors. Whilst neither should be forced, they are important targets and should govern the ways in which programs are planned.

The working group meeting provided an opportunity to explore the various roles of the international development agencies; the constraints which govern the extent and nature of their involvement; and the particular strengths they bring to the development process. The way in which the World Bank, for example, is geographically centralized and is unlikely to respond in the same way as UNICEF, given its network of local offices. Clearly the source and nature of the funding which supports the agencies has a major impact on their ways of working. The World Bank, a lending organization has a different set of responsibilities from the Aga Khan Foundation, which is responsible to the grantee. A government donor agency, responsible to its taxpayers, is different again.

Entrenched working practices were also cited as being a source of limitation. For some bilateral agencies, this is interpreted as a tendency to adopt an overly heavy focus on governments, in the belief they are able to create change. The notion that influencing government thinking results in change fails to take account of the complexity of change process. For others, the problem was perceived as stemming from an internal culture which set the development agenda, rather than allowed the agenda to be set by partner governments. Other organizations, such as the UN, aim to promote an international agenda. Despite constraints set by organizational boundaries and practices, development agencies share a clear and well defined goal: to help the poor and uphold international conventions on rights.

All parties represented at the working group meeting stated that they lacked the necessary technical capacity to respond effectively to the demands of constructing a school improvement program for rural communities. All accepted that the best way to overcome this short fall was through working collaboratively, capitalizing on strengths and forging alliances to overcome weaknesses. Individual agencies bring specific strengths to the development process. The World Bank has a particular role in financial analysis linked to Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). Other bilateral development agencies have a particular role in facilitating governments in developing a sector wide approach to developments in education. NGOs have a different type of role. International NGOs may have a particular role to play in working with communities, or working with groups of teachers, while local NGOs are in a position to participate in the advocacy process in ways that are not open to international organizations.

The activities so far in *The Effective Schooling in Rural Africa* program have helped to consolidate the information base, and reinforce partnerships for supporting quality improvement in teaching and learning. Much has yet to be achieved. In subsequent stages, the development team will seek to maximize those partnerships and provide assistance in widening the dialogue, both within and across countries, as well as with the many organizations and agencies which are committed to quality improvement in schooling.

Annex 1- The working group meeting

Key objectives, participants and organizations represented

The development team involved in supporting the program *Effective Schooling in Rural Africa* began by compiling and synthesizing some core information on school improvement in rural settings. A multi-agency working group meeting was convened at the Copthorne Hotel, Surrey UK (29th May-2nd June 2000) to test out and expand the knowledge base which informed the program; and develop partnerships. The working group sessions focused on:

- The factors which contribute to good schooling;
- The main challenges which face schooling in rural Africa;
- The types of initiatives which have worked around the world to improve schooling and which could be used to address the challenges found in rural Africa;
- What happens when localized initiatives are integrated into a national program;
- Gaps in thinking and development where new thought and imagination are required;
- The key issues related to the process of creating change for education in rural areas;
- The role of international agencies in that process.

Invitations to the meeting were wide ranging, and although not all the organizations, agencies or country representatives who were invited were able to attend, nevertheless, the development group reflected a range of participants and proved to be a rich source of information and experience. Participants are listed below:

Organization/agency	Participants
Aga Khan Foundation	Jeremy Greenland, Seth Ong'uti
DFID (Uganda)	Mike Ward
Education Consultant (Dakar)	Malcolm Skilbeck
Education International	Emmanuel Fatoma
FAWE	Penina Mlama
Maarifa ni Ufunguo (Tanzania)	Kate Dyer
Save the Children (UK)	David Norman
Teacher Inservice Project (South Africa)	Sue Davidoff
UNESCO (Senegal)	Armoogum Parsumaren
UNESCO (IIEP)	Anton De Grauwe
UNICEF	Elaine Furniss
USAID (AIR)	Jane Schubert
World Bank (Africa Region)	Mercy Tembon, Adriaan Verspoor, Adriana Jaramillo, Bob Prouty, Mamadou Ndoeye
World Bank (Effective Schools and Teachers Thematic Group)	Kathryn Riley, Helen Craig, Mark Poston