more fumbling at the margins or a strategic break?

a choice for the education donor group in Tanzania

Rakesh Rajani, December 2008
will we be able to look at our great grand-children and explain what we did?
outline of presentation

• assessing progress in education
  – the official story
  – the real picture

• what can you (donors) do about it?
  – why its not working
  – what it takes
  – will you do it? possible, but not likely
1.11 state of education: official story

- enrollment in PEDP and SEDP up by 3m+
- MDG for education reached
- secondary school in every ward, through unprecedented expansion.
- 50,000+ classrooms built
- more books – in primary 1:3 ratio reached.
- many more teachers trained and in place – yes not adequately trained but this is a stop gap measure.
1.12 state of education: official story

• there are some problems, but ‘we are working on those’:
  – improving quality
  – access to children with disabilities
  – equity of teacher placements
• PSLE pass rates have increased dramatically from 20s to 50s %
• overall still the biggest achievement of the last 7 years in Tanzania is education.
1.21 the reality: enrolment

• enrolment is a child’s name on a list, does not mean that you are attending school.
  – HBS data integrity better, but still limited
  – anecdotaly attendance 35-65%? SGACA?

• teacher:pupil ratios far from standards, highly inequitable across regions/districts (and wards?)
  – but actually classroom situation much worse because many teachers not assigned to teach
1.22 the reality: teachers and teaching

- teacher attendance data unreliable, and teachers often don’t show up in classrooms (use viranja)
  - Uganda WB assessment showed 18% there
  - my limited sample shows less than ¼ in Tz
- teaching still largely chalk and talk, children to copy notes off the board
- teacher training (yebo yebo & vodafasta) a mockery, no in-school support
1.23 the reality: textbooks and libraries

• textbooks data figures unreliable, no solid basis or evidence
• in practice many books locked up in cupboards
• current impasse with publishers has production and distribution constipated
• no libraries to speak of, and innovations such as Tusome atrophying
• bottom line: children don’t have reliable access to books
1.24 the reality: funding

- Capitation grant: unreliable, unpredictable, unclear, less money reaches primary school today and it is more opaque than 3 years ago.
- Lessons of 2004 PETS ignored, not clear how much the planned one will succeed
- Spaghetti like funding confusion caused by multiple funding streams/sources prevails (and likely to get worse if CDF gets introduced)
- Little ability to ascertain value for money.
- Despite the PETS mania, little real opportunity for citizens to follow-up, know, have consequences
- In the meantime highly inequitable and harmful unregulated contributions are back…
1.25 the reality: violence in school

• Violence – corporal punishment is rife, in some cases leading to maiming and death
• Sexual harassment commonplace – of female students, but also teachers
• Pregnant schoolgirls tip of iceberg, and discussed but no policy movement
• All this embedded in broader shikamoo culture – autocracy, lack of debate, no questions
1.31 what can we conclude?

- State of education: Veneer of progress, hollow shell of a system
- PSLE fudging and faulty structure explains better results, not real progress
  - Cf. HakiElimu study in 6 districts shows up to 90% not able to read/write at their levels
- Lots of schooling, but no learning
- Schools are failing to live up to policy promises and people’s aspirations
1.32 real skills needed

- Students unable to:
  - read, write, arithmetic
  - think
  - analyze, synthesize
  - be creative
  - make good judgments
  - solve problems
  - craft an argument
  - deal with unfamiliar situations
  - etc

... and after graduation:

- Leavers unable to:
  - thrive in higher education
  - secure jobs
  - secure livelihoods
  - cope with a complex world
  - etc
1.41 the bottom line

• education in a state of real crisis
  – but we pretend it's generally fine, in the right direction
• government is failing to provide leadership and policy coherence
  – but not really facing the consequences or accountability
• large resources (money, time, political capital) wasted
  – while yet another generation misses out…
1.42 why does it happen?

- Perhaps its because its other people’s children …
- Perhaps because the incentives are aligned in a way that compels governments and donors alike to tell good story …
- Or perhaps we are just doing what we are used to, and lack the imagination to do something different
2.1 analyzing the problem

• the core problem is lack of government leadership and effective accountability ... but donors are not helping
  – Lose the forest for the trees
  – Throw dialogue & technical solutions to essentially institutional & political problems
  – Don’t how to play an effective post-Paris/GBS role, particularly dealing with conflict of interest
  – Don’t know how to handle political dynamics, little club discussions that can get away with going nowhere because of little public accountability
So what then should donors do?
2.2 make a break

• Understand the gravity of the crisis, stop spin-speak, say it plainly
• This is not the time for incrementalism, make radical changes instead of rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic
• Figure out the leadership that this will take on the donor side too
2.3 focus on a few things

Focus on a few strategic things, e.g.

- Focus on learning outcomes – what are children able to do (Galabawa policy doc?)
- Better measure for learning than PSLE, (e.g. explore Uwezo EA based on ASER India)
- Capitation grant reaching school predictably, everyone knows and can be followed up, and it is well used
- Govt pact with teachers, govt guarantees A B C in exchange for teachers delivering X Y Z
- Radically meaningful access to information
2.4 understand its incentives

• Change is not about TA, frameworks, plans, filling in accountability boxes, but about **getting the incentives right**:
  – Teacher/Govt Compact
  – Capitation grant reaching schools
  – Cash on delivery innovation
2.5 change is not about a better version of the same…

• Change is not about improving the machinery of development aid (MKUKUTA, JAS, PAF, sector dialogue) – this is an artificial parallel junket that’s ultimately ineffective
  – But replacing it with some in the real world, based on what incentives can be brought to bear
So the real question is not what donors can do …

… but what needs to be done and what it will take in Tanzania to get it done
This is about public engagement:

- firing the public imagination,
- citizens becoming aware and engaged
- parliaments asking questions
- bishops and imams using moral fervor and follow-up
- media provoking outrage and inspiring people with the possibility of change
3. possible?

Its not business as usual, far beyond your comfort zones, not the sort of things donors do

… I wont bet that you will pull it off because of the extraordinary exercise of leadership and imagination that it will take

… but it is possible, and ethically and strategically the only option you have