A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION IN THE GAMBIA

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRWC	The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AFET	Association of Farmers and Educators
BSED	Basic and Secondary Education Directorate
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPA	Child Protection Alliance
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DOSE	Department Of State for Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education For All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FAWE-GAM	Forum for African Women Educationalists – Gambia Chapter
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GABECE	Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination
GAIS	Arab Gambia Islamic Certificate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GTTI	Gambia Technical Training Institute
HTC	Higher Teacher's Certificate
ILO	International Labor Organization
LBS	Lower Basic School
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MLA	Monitoring of Learning Achievement
NAS	National Aids Secretariat
NAT	National Assessment Test
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
NSGA	Nova Scotia Gambia Association
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PEGEP	President's Empowerment for Girl's Education
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate
PTC	Primary Teacher's Certificate
SQAD	Standards and Quality Assurance Directorate
SSS	Senior Secondary School
UBS	Upper Basic School
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UTG	University of The Gambia
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The benefits of education towards ensuring a better life are numerous. It can change the lives of people like girls or other vulnerable groups such as orphans or children with disability. The rights of these groups are covered by international conventions and declarations and member states have responded by signing such treaties enacting laws and policies that protect the interests of such people as children and women. For example, Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that: *state parties should recognize the right of the child to education and should make primary education compulsory and available free for all.* Evidently, the 1997 Constitution of the Gambia, the supreme law of the country, guarantees every child's right to free, compulsory and basic education.

The provision of education in the Gambia is guided by the Laws of the Gambia 1963, chapter 46 and the Education Act passed by Parliament in 1992. The constitution of the Republic of The Gambia (1997) also makes education a fundamental human right. The same chapter and section of the constitution also indicates an undertaking, by government, to make secondary education (including technical & vocational education) and higher education accessible to all.

The basic level comprises of six years of lower basic school education followed by three years of upper basic education. With the phasing out of the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE), a nine year continuous education had been assured which forms the basic education cycle. After the basic level children can proceed to the secondary level which also comprises of three years. The current and past Education Policies (1988 – 2003 & 2004 – 2015), encourage the provision of early childhood education by the private sector and recommended government to continue the coordination and supervision of the provision of ECD. An Early Childhood policy document has been prepared and is awaiting approval to guide the policy framework of a national integrated early childhood education delivery, which should cover children, aged 0-8 years.

Although the financing of education in the Gambia is basically in the hands of the state, external aid finances more than 50 percent of government development expenditures on education. Collaboration with partners and donors therefore has produced numerous benefits to children especially girls whose enrolment and participation in this sector was low compared to that of boys. Globally, however, Africa is dragging its feet with 64per cent of 104 million children without access to education in sub- Saharan Africa including the Gambia.

The various school types in the Gambia can be categorized as: Government, Grant Aided, Private Schools and Madrassas. The Madrassas system is taught through an Arabic medium and like the ECDs it is managed by the private sector.

Save the Children Sweden needs a relevant tool for monitoring and evaluating the policies and programs regarding education in the Gambia, as they will contribute towards concrete measures to improve accessibility, enrolment, and quality education. This is the rationale why Save the Children Sweden decided to carry out a situational analysis of education in the Gambia. The adoption of treaties in the interests of children such as MDGs, EFA, CRC, ACRWC, a World Fit for Children etc indicate the importance attached to children within the Gambian legal and education frameworks. Their rights to education, health care, and protection from abuse, exploitation, violence and worst forms of labor are enshrined in these conventions, declarations, policies etc.

The Gambia, in response to international treaties, has enacted laws, policies and conducted studies that look into the situation of children. Such studies include a situational study of orphans in the Gambia focusing on the enrolment, academic achievement, and other aspects. Another such study is the national disability survey which in addition to the study mentioned above looked into the feasibility of mainstream schools in integrating disabled children, and the discrimination and harassment reported on these children by peers and teachers.

Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Education for All (EFA) all have provisions for inclusion of early childhood development as priority area for human resource development in support of national development processes. Even though the Gambia government recognizes the importance of the early years for the development of a child, and acknowledges ECD as an integral part of basic education, ECD is still mainly provided by the private sector. However government fully participated in the development an ECD policy aimed at meeting the needs of the children as well as ensuring their integration.

Interventions in the Education sector form an integral part of the report. In the area of special education where disadvantaged children are included, the Gambia as a nation and its education sector as a whole achieved great strides. Looking back at the 1965-75 and 1976-86 policies where efforts were confined to training programs for the blind and mute Children, both the just ended 1988-2003 and new education policy 2004-2015 have by contrast included special needs education as priority areas. Thus the establishment of a Special needs education unit within the Basic education directorate.

Action Aid the Gambia is always cited and remembered as the organisation that enables thousands of Gambian children to have access to education. This success story has seen many teachers hired and thousands of Gambian children from deprived areas enrolled in schools. Furthermore, interviews were held with different institutions that deal with issues affecting children. Interviews were conducted with some senior officials and staff of some NGOs, CBOs, UN agencies, child-led organizations and certain units of the Department of State for Education. Regarding the issue of child protection, CPA has achieved a lot in the area of child protection. The approval of the Children's Act 2005, the 2004 Tourism Act, the 2003 draft National Policy on Children and the Code of Conduct developed by the media houses on reporting cases pertaining to children are all measured aimed at protecting the interest of the child.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is vital to ensuring better quality life, particularly, for girls and other vulnerable children like orphans and children with disabilities. It also helps to generate the patterns of inclusive growth on which poverty reduction depends. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that: state parties should recognize the right of the child to education and should make primary education compulsory and available free for all. Similarly, articles 11.2 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and article 21 of the Jomtien Declaration both emphasize the right of every child to educational

opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. In the same vein, the 1997 Constitution of the Gambia also guarantees every child's right to free, compulsory and basic education.

The Gambia is a signatory to all these conventions and declarations such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), World Fit for Children amongst others. Evidently, the 1997 Constitution of the Gambia, the supreme law of the country, guarantees every child's right to free, compulsory and basic education.

This Situational Analysis of Education in The Gambia is divided into Six main parts. Part one is the introduction, which gives a brief historical overview of education in The Gambia, context and justification of the study, international Conventions and Declarations and spells out the study methodology. The second part is the literature review and a review of education policies, interventions in the sector and achievements made in terms of number of institutions established and growth in enrolment.

The third section of the report discusses the education policies introduced in the country and looks at targets set in these policies. In the fourth section strengths and weaknesses of the education sector with regards policies, interventions and laws have been discussed. In the fifth section, challenges, lessons learnt and best practices in the education sector have been reviewed. The sixth and final part constitutes the conclusions and recommendations for the improvement of the sector.

1.1 Legislative Framework

The provision of education in the Gambia is guided by the Laws of the Gambia 1963, chapter 46 and the Education Act passed by Parliament in 1992. The Education Act which has also repealed Cap 46, 47:04 and Cap 48:01 of the 1963 Act and saved all other sections of the Act, provides the basis for *" the management and development of educational services in the Gambia, the registration of teachers and control of schools and to make provisions for matters connected therewith"* (pp.44).

The constitution of the Republic of The Gambia (1997) also makes education a fundamental human right. Chapter IV Section 30 provides for all persons the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and also makes provision for compulsory and free basic (primary and lower secondary) education to all. The same chapter and section of the constitution also indicates an undertaking, by government, to make secondary education (including technical & vocational education) and higher education accessible to all.

Despite these provisions in the Constitution, primary education is only non-fee paying, with households bearing the educational expenses such as uniforms, lunches, exercise books, transportation and other learning materials. Consequently basic education is not yet made compulsory.

The Local Government Act (April 2002) prepares the way for the management of schools at decentralized level under a new dispensation. According to the Act, Part IV, Section 66, the sole authority, for the establishment of schools within Local Government Area, shall be the Council for the area. The educational services under the jurisdictions of the councils include establishments and management of Council schools, monitoring the establishment and

operations of all educational and training facilities to ensure compliance with national policy guidelines. When the Act becomes fully operational and the Finance and Audit Bill passed, the Department of State for Education will transfer to local government authorities the responsibility of opening and managing all public schools while the private schools will be monitored to ensure compliance to national policies. This will also lead to the transfer of all budgetary allocations to schools to the local government authorities within the jurisdiction of which the schools are located.

1.2 Types of Educational Institutions

The primary school is the first compulsory school in the Gambia and covers grades 1 to 6. All children in the Gambia are legally bound to attend the primary school as part of the compulsory schooling policy. The various school types in the Gambia can be categorized as: Government, Grant Aided, Private Schools and Madrassas.

Government primary schools are fully owned and operated by government and are non-fee paying. They are directly under the supervision of the Department of State for Education who is fully in charge of teacher recruitment, deployment, curriculum development, classes and teachers, inspections as well as the management and auditing of financial and any other resources.

Grant aided are schools run and managed by either Christian or Muslim missionaries that receive subsidies or grants from the government and are also non-fee paying. The grants cover staff salaries, gratuities and allowances. Although they are privately managed through Board of Governors appointed by the Department of State for Education, the ministry supervises them in the same way as Government schools and they teach the same curriculum as the public schools.

Private schools, on the other hand, receive no subsidy from the government and are fully financed through fees and other contributions. However, they are required by the laws to follow the national curriculum of the government schools and the Department of State for Education reserves the right to inspect these schools at any time to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Laws of the Gambia (1963) and Education Act (1992).

Madrassa schools or institutions are formal and organized Arabic-Islamic educational institutions with a physical environment similar to the formal schools but using Arabic as medium of instruction instead of English. These institutions even though receiving grants from government (covering salaries for English teachers posted in madrassa) are mainly run by private providers.

1.3   The Gambia's Education Sector: Structure, Management and Budgeting.

1.3.1 Structure

The education system in the Gambia is characterized by the co-existence of two complementary streams. The mainstream is based on secular education system carried over from the colonial era. There also exists a religious or Madrassah system of education. While the mainstream uses English as the medium of instruction modeled after the British education

system, the Madrassah uses Arabic as a medium of instruction and modeled after the Egyptian/Saudi/etc… systems. In spite of this diversity, the above streams apparently have certain common elements, and there exists plans of mainstreaming Madrassah graduates into formal schools or at university level. This will enable Madrassah graduates to secure equal chances to employment in the formal sector. The mainstream education system in The Gambia's education is of the following structure: -

➢ The early childhood level which enrolls children from three to six or seven years and mostly run by private individuals, groups, missions, NGO supported and those with informal support from government.

➢ The basic level comprises of six years of lower basic school education followed by three years of upper basic education. Whilst pupils from well-off families attend the private schools the rest of the populace attend the grant –aided, public schools and madrassahs. With the phasing out of the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE), a nine-year continuous education had been assured which forms the basic education cycle. At the end of this cycle pupils sit to the GABECE administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC).

➢ After the basic level children can proceed to the secondary level which also comprises three years of education. At the end of the three years of further secondary education students sit to the West African Senior Secondary School Examination (WASSCE). After completion of these courses students either go to other sub-vented institutions such as GTTI to learn skills or some trade or go to university.

➢ The University of the Gambia offers a four-year under-graduate course. Completion of a degree course is a pre-requisite for appointment to a white-collar in the civil service or the private sector.

1.3.2 Management

Both the 1988-2003 and 2004-2015 Education Policies recognize the need for early childhood education and recommended government to continue the coordination and supervision of the provision of ECD on private basis. Thus its management at present is exclusively in the hands of the private operators, some NGOs and religious bodies running such schools. An Early Childhood Policy document is prepared and awaiting approval to guide the policy framework of a national integrated early childhood education delivery, which should cover children, aged 0-8 years.

As the Constitution of The Gambia has recognized provision of universal compulsory basic education, the Government has assumed direct responsibility of the provision and management of primary education. This is manifested by the policy pronouncement of 9 years of uninterrupted basic education to all children. The overall responsibility of management of Basic education lies with the DOSE. While the DOSE is involved in formulation of policies, the responsibility of implementation of the same rests with the Basic and Secondary Education Directorate (BSED). The BSED and its subordinate offices and regional directorates are solely responsible for management and supervision of basic education. Their responsibilities include posting, and transfer of teachers and other staff;

arranging in-service training of teachers; and distribution of free textbooks, and supervision of schools.

1.3.3 Budgeting

Education in the Gambia is basically state financed. However, given the low revenue / GDP ratio, the government however is heavily dependent on external sources for financing its development budget. External aid finances more than 50 percent of government development expenditures on education.

The government therefore in collaboration with partners and donors had to intervene with programs like School Feeding Program, Lower and Upper basic Education Stipend (DINA SAID Fund), and Stipend for Girl Students at secondary schools (Girls Scholarship Trust fund), Girl Friendly schools etc. Students on scholarship at the UTG, are almost entirely State financed.

1.4 Context and Justification of the Study

Education should aim to develop the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities in order to prepare him/her for a responsible life in a free society. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), every child has the right to education that should be free and compulsory. It is unanimously shared that development is not possible without a quality education of its population; it is an indisputable guarantee of human protection. Such is the meaning of article 28 of the UNCRC and article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In accordance with their commitments, National legislations of several countries have made provisions to ensure children's rights to education.

Several international meetings (i.e. Jomtien, Salamanca, and Dakar etc.) have consecrated deep reflections aimed at ensuring that all countries uphold the commitment to provide free quality education to each child of school going age. Regrettably, the results of several studies indicate that a great majority of children in the world are not in the school system (the State of the World's Children Report, 2005). According to the World Report *Education For All,* Africa is dragging its feet with 64per cent of 104 million children without access to education in sub- Saharan Africa, The Gambia being no exception.

Although the Gambia has adopted policies for education and training, enacted laws, which make basic education compulsory for all children, put in place programmes to modernize Madrassa schools by harmonizing their syllabuses to that of the formal system of education, and made commitments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) regarding Education For All by 2015, a lot still remains to be done. There is data on formal education both at the Central Statistics Department and at the Department of State for Education (Planning unit), which indicates that much is still lacking on the informal education sector.

Therefore, Save the Children Sweden in its vision to realize the rights of the child and to develop a program in a progressive way deemed it necessary to carry out a Situational Analysis of Education in The Gambia. It is against this background that Save the Children commissioned this study to diagnose the education system, highlighting the system's

weaknesses and strength in order to draw practical and operational recommendations. This report will also serve as for monitoring and evaluating the policies and programs regarding education in the Gambia, as they will contribute towards concrete measures to improve accessibility, enrolment and quality of education.

1.5   Study Methodology

A situational analysis of this nature of the education sector in the Gambia has not been carried out before, although many studies were conducted on women and children that have looked at access to education. The first step was to carry out a literature review on international conventions and declarations on the rights of the child and the right to education, as well as conventions that protect the child from worst forms of labor. Also, existing Gambian laws, policies, and data on children and the education policies were reviewed. Interviews were conducted with a number of institutions with a stake in the education sector. Among the institutions visited were organizations working with children (CPA, Youth Ambassadors of Peace and Lend a Hand Society), UN agencies, NGOs, and certain units at the Department of State for Education (Special Needs unit, EFA network, ECD and the EMIS units).

For this study, the strategy of Save the Children Sweden is the identification of the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) as home institution of this study, and to work with the central Statistics Department (CSD). The study under the overall coordination of the CPA identified key stakeholders to serve as task force assigned with the responsibilities of overseeing the consultants' reports to ensure compliance with their TORs as well as maintaining the standards of the final documents. The consultants submitted both the first and second drafts to the task force members who reviewed and made comments on the drafts and these were incorporated by the consultants. The CPA was also tasked to convene and facilitate the periodic task force meetings, coordinate and monitor the consultants' works progress as well as forwarding the final document to Save the Children Sweden Regional Office in Dakar. In collaboration with CPA as well as in agreement with CSD, Save the Children Sweden recruited 2 consultants (a statistician demographer and an economist/Education Planner).

In the literature review, Gambian laws were examined in relation to international conventions and declarations on the rights of the child. Successive education policies were also reviewed and policy objectives looked into. Since the collection of raw data was beyond the scope of this analysis, available secondary data from nationally representative surveys and education statistics compiled by the Department of State for Education were reviewed with a view to assessing the situation of children in The Gambia. In this process both quantitative and qualitative data on children were reviewed.

Although the education sector in The Gambia is largely state funded, there are a number of actors in the sector who have contributed invaluably in promoting education in the country. It was therefore deemed necessary to conduct interviews with the main institutions either providing educational and related services or funding such services. These institutions are mainly non-governmental. Heads of these institutions or their representatives were asked about their intervention areas, achievements, best practices and constraints. This exercise was aimed at identifying key actors in the education sector, their areas of intervention, successes and constraints.

Based on the review of interventions in the education sector, strengths and weaknesses of the sector were examined and highlighted. Finally, conclusions were drawn on the situation of the education sector in The Gambia and fitting recommendations made on remedial measures to help ameliorate the situation.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This exercise entailed a review of existing data on education, policies and programs and conventions and declarations relevant to the education sector. For a thorough understanding of gains made in the sector, best practices, constraints, interventions and collaborating agencies some heads of key institutions acting in the education sector were interviewed. The institutions interviewed numbered 16. A major limitation of the review is the inadequacy of data to establish trends in enrolment over a long period of time. The absence of more recent data from the sector made it extremely difficult to have a better look at recent trends in the education sector. It is worth noting that the problem of availability of up-to-date data is not unique to the education sector but a national problem affecting all sectors.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section, divided into three parts, highlights international conventions, declarations and government policies and laws put in place to protect the interests of children in The Gambia. All these policies and laws indicate Gambia Government's commitment to the international conventions and declarations and their desire to protect the rights of children.

2.1 Review of International Conventions and Declarations

Recognizing the essential rights of children to education, the world leaders have committed themselves to international conventions and declarations that protect the best interest of children. The Gambia government as a signatory to these conventions and declarations has put in place national education policies and other initiatives that call for a non-fee paying and compulsory primary education and to increase access, improve quality and relevance of education and also to close the gender disparity as well as the rural urban differentials in enrolment. These policies are the First Education Policy 1965 – 1975, the Second Education Policy 1976 – 1986, the Third Education Policy 1988 – 2003 and the 2004 – 2015 Education Policy as well as the National Policy on the advancement of Gambian Women and the Draft National Policy on Children among others. The aims and objectives of these policies are synchronized with education related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), The African Charter on the Rights of the Child (ACRWC), A World Fit for Children and the Salamanca Declaration and Frame of Action as well as the Worst Forms of Labor and the Minimum Age Convention.
Below are series of conventions and declarations that underscore the child's right to education and protection from abuse, exploitation, violence and worst forms of labor.

Despite ratifying all these conventions, Early Childhood Development, which is a fundamental factor of child development, is not given adequate attention by Government. Government's priority is focused on primary and tertiary education rather than on early childhood development. The few Early Childhood Development Centers that exist in the

country are operated and managed by NGOs like the Christian Children Fund and the private sector who engage in limited consultation with Government on issues that concern children.

In the Gambia as in many African countries, culture and tradition downplay the right to opinion for the child. Children in the Gambia have little room for participation in decision making both at national and household levels. At the national level they are not provided with adequate opportunities to express their political opinion though they have the right to vote at the age of eighteen, while at the household level they are subjects of recipients of information as they have limited permission to speak in the midst of elders. It is a strong cultural norm that children should not, in most cases, participate in discussions where elders are present even though the discussions that ensue may affect them one way or the other. This situation goes further to interfere with their career and social development, which sometimes is dictated by their parents at their detriment. Evidence that young women are more prepared to speak against forced marriage are the increasing number of cases reported to the Department of State for Social Welfare. Seven (7) cases of such were reported in 1999/2000.

In the Gambia Geographic access to education facilities is considered adequate. Most parts of the country have primary, junior and senior schools. Parents as a result experience relatively little difficulties in securing schools for their children compared to the past. However, quality of education is relatively inadequate compared to the past. The shift in education policy and practice in recent years did not happen along with the required institutional capacity for the systems, structures and facilities. The West Africa Senior School Leaving Certificate Examination (WASSCE), which replaced the General Certificate of Ordinary Level Examinations (GCE O' Level), is not widely recognized making it difficult for further training outside the Gambia.

Although free and compulsory basic education for all children is entrenched in the constitution, it seems far from being implemented. Government recognized the series of constraints associated with this noble goal, but made no reservations at the time of ratifying the convention. This implies that Government should make efforts to address the pertinent issues in the education sector by securing and allocating sufficient resources to the sector. NGOs and the civil society are with view that the education policy is over ambitious and Government seems not to have the capacity to achieve the targets set.

The Millennium Declaration was adopted by member states of the United Nations in September 2000, the Gambia included. It contains eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), ranging from eradicating extreme poverty, universal primary education to all children to combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. The MDGs detail out 18 specific development targets, each of which has a target future, a time frame, and indicators designed to monitor the extent to which the target has been achieved. According to goal 2 (Achieve universal primary education) member states should ensure that all boys and girls complete full course of primary schooling and this should be achieved by 2015. Whilst goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women and the target is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

The first, second, third and the current 2004 –2015 education policies, the draft national policy on children and the national policy on the advancement of Gambian women are in line with goal two and three of the MDGs as they all indicated that children should have access to primary education as well recommending the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

The EFA is an international commitment that was launched in Jomtien, Thailand to bring the benefits of education to 'every citizen in every society'. As a result of slow progress over the decade, the commitment was reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 and then again in September 2000. Article 1 of the declaration states that: every person – child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. Whilst Article 3 states that: basic education should be provided to all children, youth, and adults. To this end, the Gambia adopted an expanded vision of basic education services of quality should aiming at an uninterrupted 9 years of basic education whilst consistent measures were put in place to ensure that disparities are reduced.

2.2   Review of Education Policies

The Gambian education system has over the years undergone series of significant configurations, ranging from partial structural reforms to a radical transposition of many of its aspects. These stemmed from attempts aimed at responding to changing needs and circumstances, guided by perspectives and experiences derived from both national and international contexts. Cognisant of the fact that education is change-driven and change-oriented, amidst the research findings that inform policy decisions; the mutation of the system has neither been fortuitous nor dictated by mere natural tendencies. The implication is that the interventions made have transformed the system according to national priorities and visions.

While the first ten-year policy (1976-86) was limited in scope in several aspects, it provided the praxis to unearth the underlying elements that needed to be overhauled or improved upon; hence the lessons were fed into the succeeding fifteen-year policy (1988-2003). Mindful of national guidelines, policies and plans, such as Vision 2020 and the PRSP, the 1988-2003 policy, through regular review, update and adaptation, resulted in significant achievements vis-à-vis access to relevant basic education. Thus, the last decade principally witnessed an unparalleled expansion of the system at all levels, from early childhood education to tertiary and higher education. The intensification of efforts directed at eliminating gender and regional disparities paid dividends tremendously. Gender parity, for instance, has almost been achieved at the lower basic (primary) level and enrolment, retention and performance in the regions are improving substantially.

The 2004-2015 policy focuses on ensuring that the right to quality education for all is upheld and that Education for All, with its ramifications, and the Millennium Development Goals are achieved. The ultimate object of eliminating poverty, enhancing quality living and nurturing a learning society forms the cornerstone of this policy.
The development of the Education Policy 2004 – 2015 is premised on both The Gambia's Vision 2020 and the PRSP, both of which are the development agenda of government, which seeks to improve the human capital of the country by reducing the number of people living below the poverty line. Thus the theme of the policy consultations was *"Rethinking Education for Poverty Reduction"*.

2.3   Review of Existing Data on Children of the Gambia

This section reviews some of the existing data on children in the Gambia and highlights key issues related to education and child rights.

2.3.1   Situational Analysis of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in The Gambia.

For the purpose of this study school enrolment data was collected 9for children between the ages of 7 – 17) and captured those currently attending school, previously attended school and never attended school. For those currently attending school, control children accounted for the highest 76.0per cent, followed by orphans 73.7per cent and orphans and severely disabled accounted for the lowest 72.5per cent. Whilst for those who had previously attended school, orphans and disabled and severely disabled children accounted for the highest 7.5per cent each and control children accounted for 6.6per cent. Finally, 18.8per cent orphans, 20.1per cent orphans and severely disabled and 17.4 of control children never attended school, be it Western or Madrassa.

Reasons for not being able to continue their schooling, among the 80 orphans interviewed, 40.0 percent reported that there was no one to pay their school fees, whilst 27.5 reported a parent had died. Similar trend was observed for the 83 orphans and severely disabled children surveyed, as 38.6 percent of them reported there was no one to pay their school fees and 26.5 percent of them reported a dead of a parent. For the control children, a different pattern has been observed as academic drop out, which is low for both orphans and orphans and severely disabled accounted for the highest 26.8 percent whilst no one to pay their school fees accounted for 23.2 percent and none of them reported the dead of a parent as a reason for not continuing their education. Some of the children mentioned illness as a reason for not being able to continue their education, 12.5 percent orphans, 13.3 percent orphans and severely disabled children and 8.9 percent control children There was a response category 'others' and it includes assisting in domestic or farm work, child refusing to go school, not liking western schooling, prefer the Islamic schooling, father sick, change of residence and one mentioned pregnancy. In this category control children accounted for the highest 39.3 percent, followed by orphans and severely disabled children 33.7 percent and orphans 32.5.

Regarding school enrolment of children between 3 to 6 years old, 144 children were reported to be in school. The concentration was higher in Banjul and Kanifing and this could be attributed to large concentration of nursery schools and day care centers in these areas. The data also shows that orphans between the ages 3 – 6 are more like to be enrolled in school than non-orphans. In this age group, the proportion of orphans attending school is higher or equivalent to that of non-orphans. This has been attributed to the fact that young orphans have a better educational opportunity than non – orphans. It has been attributed to the fact that orphan careers find it advantageous for them to be cared for at nursery schools.

2.3.2   Study on the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Gambia

This is a three chaptered report and it recounts incidents that expose the vulnerability of children of the Gambia to the repercussions of being poor. This has been attributed to the influx of refugees to the Gambia due to political instability in neighboring countries, the rising levels of poverty, growing tourism and increasing consumerism, all combined to create a conducive atmosphere for the culture of sexual abuse and exploitation to thrive, according to the report, which also gives some indication of the nature and scope of the problem.

It gives a general overview of child abuse by Gambians (sugar daddies) and strangers (tourists) and outlines the government and UNICEF's findings and current interventions by them to stem the tide of sexual abuse. The study also observes that sexual harassment by teachers and other male students are taking place in schools more frequently that are ever reported.

The main conclusions of the study are that there is sexual exploitation of children in the tourism sector and indeed there are tourists whose primary motive of coming to the Gambia on holidays is to be able to have sex with underage children. But the most widespread and pervasive form of sexual abuse and exploitation of children is what is called the 'Sugar Daddy' phenomenon. This is the sexual abuse and exploitation of girls by adult Gambian men for money and gifts.

According to the study, factors contributing to the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse and exploitation are poverty, inadequate and non-implementation of laws, lack of life skills and livelihood skills for young people, the culture of silence, non – registration of births and the sexual behavior of some adults in society.

2.3.3   Disabled Children in Mainstream Schools (National Disability Survey)

The 1998 National Disability Survey was in two folds; one was at the household level and the other was in the mainstream schools. The latter's main objective of this part of the National Disability Survey was to examine the utilization of mainstream primary schools by parents for the education of disabled children. As such, issues of capacity and limitation of the primary schools in meeting the needs and demands for the disabled children are assessed. Capacity issues examined dealt with the integration and normalization efforts within the primary school cycle. Efficiency of schools in terms of registration, retention, acquisition of basic life and learning skills for disabled children and dropouts have also been examined for the ultimate development of an integrated education scheme.

The data reveals that 25.7 percent of the disabled children are partially sighted. Children with significant speaking problems constitute 12.3 percent, significant mobility problems 8.9 percent, hard of hearing 5.4 percent, and significant manipulation and fits problems 3.7 percent each.

The report reveals that there is a total lack of special facilities and services to enhance the educational environment of the disabled children in mainstream schools. In addition, there are inadequate trained and specialized teachers and no ramps for easy access to classrooms for the physically disabled. There were also no toilets to suit the needs of the disabled. As a result of the lack of untrained and specialized teachers, most of the schools do not have the capacity to tailor the timetables to suit the needs of the disabled children.

There was no discrimination between disabled children and their normal classmates in mainstream schools. The disabled were generally accepted in mainstream schools, as 36.5 and 53.8 percent of the schools rated complaints of peer harassment and discrimination of disabled children as 'never' and 'rarely' respectively. By contrast, only 3.8 percent of the schools reported that peer harassment and discrimination of disabled children do occur 'frequently'.

On the academic performance of the disabled children vis-à-vis the normal children, 73.3 percent of the head teachers rated it as good. At the national level, the repetition rate for disabled is about 10 percent. This is twice higher than the target rate of 4 percent in the current education policy. Regarding the issue of drop out, on average about 22.7 percent of the disabled children in mainstream schools had dropped out in the first years. This drop out rate compares favorably with overall dropt out rate for the last years for all students irrespective of disability. From 1993/94 to 1997/98 the overall drop out rate ranged between 18.3 to 26.3 percent (EFA, Report, 1999).

Finally, regarding the issue of integration of disabled children in mainstream schools, 69.1 percent of teachers recommended the 'integrated approach', 13.4 percent recommend 'resource centers', whilst 9.4 and 9.0 percent preferred 'special units' and special schools respectively. Just like the issue of discrimination, this is an indication that disabled children are generally accepted in mainstream schools in the Gambia.

2.3.4 Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy Report

According to the report on Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy early marriage is defined as any marriage that involves someone below the age of 18. The report cited the *Draft Situational Analysis Report* for identifying types of marriages in the Gambia.

The report indicated that there are three types of marriages that exist in the Gambia, namely, civil marriages, religious marriages and customary marriages. For civil marriages the parties to marry should be 21 years or over, if not a written permission is required from the parents before the marriage is consummated. Religious marriages on the other hand are in two folds. One is the Christian marriage and the other is the Islamic marriage. According to the report, the formers marriage constitute less than 5 percent of all marriages and due to the different denominations, there are different age brackets set for marriages. For the Catholic Church Canon Law, 16 is the required aged for males and 14 for females. The other denominations set 21 for males and 18 for females. For the Islamic marriage, the determinant to get married is not based on age but on the physical maturity of women to determine 'majority' and the man's ability to feed, cloth and provide shelter for his family. Whilst the customary marriages are mostly on tribal lines and there are no specific ages defined by Sharia or customary law. According the report, there are instances where girls as young as 11 and 12 years old are 'given' away to older husbands against their will.

Regarding the prevalence of early marriage, the report cited the *Draft Adolescent Health Report 2000 (DAHR)*. According to the report of the 2452 young people interviewed 17 percent were married and 60 percent of those married were living in the rural areas. The data also shows that marriages increases with age for both sexes, as for girls/young women 9.1 percent get married at 16, 36.5 percent at 19, and 76 percent at 22. Whilst for boys/young men, 5.7 percent marry at 16, 14 percent at 19 and 54 percent at 22. The rural urban differential shows that girls in the rural areas are more vulnerable to early marriage below the age of 16 (4.8 percent urban and 10.8 percent rural).

Regarding the issue of teenage pregnancy and school drop out rates, the report indicated teenage pregnancy outside wedlock could affect the girl child development, as she could no longer have access to education, family support and could be discriminated by the community. The report cited a nation wide study that was conducted by the Gambia College

during the 1998/1999 school year, which indicated of the 1551 schoolgirls contacted during the survey, 36 girls (2.31per cent) were reported as pregnant. Out the 36 reported cases, ten of the girls were able to continue their education and the remaining 26 (1.67per cent) dropped out of school. Out of the pregnant girls, it was realized that 70 percent of them were single and the rest were married. Regarding those who impregnated these girls, the study reveals that members of the community accounted for the highest 43.27 percent followed by schoolboys 31 percent and male teachers accounted for the least 6.89 percent. The study concluded that unwanted teenage pregnancies leads to abandoned babies, abortion, maternal mortality and morbidity and could also lead to sexually transmitted diseases.

The report also highlighted sexual harassment in schools but according the report the magnitude of the problem remains unclear due to lack of data. During the 1998/1991 academic year a total of 5 cases of sexual harassment were from reported, one was in region 6 and the other cases were in region 4. The male teachers accounted for 3 of the cases and male students committed the other cases. Two of the cases of male teacher harassment occurred at Junior High School.

2.3.5   Corporal Punishment

A national survey on corporal punishment was only conducted in The Gambia in 2005 although anecdotal evidence has always pointed to the existence of the practice both in schools and in the homes. The 2005 survey on corporal punishment conducted by the Child Protection Alliance and commissioned by save the Children Sweden Regional Office for west Africa corroborates the notion that the practice is widespread in The Gambia and is practiced both in school and in the homes. According to results of this survey three out of five teachers admitted they would corporally punish children, four out of five parents would use corporal punishment on their children and almost a quarter said they beat their children very often. The results of the survey further showed that nearly half of the children sustained injuries as a result of their punishment. Unfortunately, the results of this survey indicate that the concepts of discipline and corporal punishment are often considered to be one and the same with corporal punishment geared towards instilling discipline into the child. Most parents believe that corporal punishment is a normal method of child rearing whilst most teachers believe that corporal punishment is the only thing that children understand when they disobey.

Findings of the survey point to the need for the populace to be enlightened on the negative consequences of corporal punishment. The fact that the survey results indicate acceptance of the practice by parents, teachers and children is a pointer to the need for a rigorous campaign to sensitize the public on the negative effects of the practice.

2.4   Review of Existing Laws and Policies Regarding Children of the Gambia

The Government of the Gambia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) the 3rd of August 1990. The Department of State for Justice is the government body responsible for the coordination and implementation of the CRC. A Child Rights Unit has been established at the Chambers with the mandate for coordinating the full implementation of the CRC. The Government had also ratified the Convention on the African Charter on the

Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) in 2000 and the ILO Conventions 182 and 138 (regarding the worst forms of child labor and a minimum age for employment).

2.4.1 The Children's Act 2005

The Children's Act 2005, a comprehensive legal framework for the promotion and protection of the rights of children in the Gambia was passed by the National Assembly on the 21st of July 2005.This is a clear manifestation of the Gambia government's commitment to improve the lives and welfare of its children and the creation of the Gambia fit for children, where the children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation are actively promoted and protected, through appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures in fulfillment of national and international obligations. According to part II of the Act (Rights of the Child) section 18. 1: 'every *child has a right to free and compulsory basic education and it shall be the duty of the Government to provide the education'*. The Act states in section 18. 2 that, '*every parent or guardian shall ensure that his or her child or ward attend and complete basic education'*.

On people with disabilities and vulnerable children, the Act states in section 12.2 that 'every child who is in need of special protection measures (includes children with disabilities, and street children), has the right to any such measure that is appropriate to his or her physical, social, economic, emotional, and material needs and under conditions which ensure his or her dignity, promote his or her self reliance and active participation in the affairs of the community. Furthermore, the Act states in section 12. 2 that: every person, authority, body or institution having the care or responsibility for ensuring the care of a child in need of special protection measures shall endeavor, within the available resources, to provide the child with such assistance and facilities which are necessary for his or her education, training, preparation for employment, rehabilitation, and recreational opportunities in a manner conducive to his or her achieving the fullest possible social integration, individual development and his or her cultural and moral development'.

The Act also paves the way for the introduction of more effective measures to protect children from abuse and exploitation. It provides for a register of child abusers and tightens laws on trafficking.

2.4.2 Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Students in Schools in The Gambia

According to the 2003 study on sexual exploitation and abuse of Gambian children, 64per cent of the prostitutes interviewed were below 18 years and were either enrolled in upper basic schools or had reached that level. According to the report if measures are not taken to curb sexual harassment and abuse in and around schools, the menace could increase and this could affect the development of the girl child. Therefore, to deal with this problem, the Guidance and Counseling Unit of the Department of State for Education in collaboration with other stakeholders develop a Policy Guidelines and Regulations on sexual Misconduct and Harassment in Gambian Educational Institutions (November 2004). The guide gives a clear definition of what is meant by sexual abuse and harassment as well the possible indicators of sexual abuse. The guide further states some of the ways in which Children can protect

themselves from sexual abuse and the reporting mechanism in case a child is being abused or harassed. The guide also highlighted roles of agencies in responding to cases of sexual harassment in schools and agencies to be contacted across the country incase a child is being abused or harassed.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND INTERVENTIONS

The basic education level comprised of a pre-school or early Child hood Care Development (ECCD) component where children start at the age of three (3) or earlier until they are seven (7) year age at which they are enrolled in Lower basic schools. The lower (6 years for children age 7-12) and upper basic (3 years for children age 12-15) combined provide the nine (9) years uninterrupted basic education which is the main thrust of the New Education Policy 2004-2015. The policy aims at providing free and compulsory basic education premised on the Gambian 1997 constitution which decrees that every Gambian child has the right to free and compulsory education. At the end of the 9 years basic education a child is deemed prepared and equipped enough to fit into any of the avenues created in post basic levels i.e. secondary education; Vocational and Technical Education and Training; Adult and Non Formal.

The Secondary Education level offer 3 years of schooling (children age 16-18) while the Vocational and Technical Education and Training offers various levels of training with various periods of time. This level constitutes the preparatory stage for tertiary and higher education.

Tertiary and higher education consist of training institutions like the GTTI, Gambia College, MDI and UTG.

Madrassa here refers to the formal Islamic Arabic Education institutions that use Arabic as a medium of instruction and have within its taught subjects the core ones (English, Mathematics, SES and Science) of the Gambian school curriculum in addition to Islamic studies. It has an ECD, LBS, UBS, BCS and SSS levels.

3.1   Expansion of Access to education

The education sector in the Gambian has been vibrant over the last two decades. The number of primary schools has increased from 227 (1990) to 411 (2005 including basic cycle) across the country. The number of UBS has reached 150 (including basic cycle) whilst that of Senior Secondary Schools rose to 49 compared to 18 in 1990. This testifies great strides that have been made in the area of access. The Madrassa institutions during the same period have recorded tremendous successes in terms of enrolment achieving 15 per cent of the total enrolment at the lower basic level and 10 per cent at the senior secondary level.

No. of Schools by Local Government Area (LGA) 1999/2000

Local Gov't Area	Lower Basic	Upper Basic	Basic Cycle	Senior 2nd	Total
1 - Banjul/KMC	36	30	0	16	82
2 - Western Division	75	24	1	7	107

3 – North Bank Division	59	8	8	4	**79**
4 - Lower River Division	38	4	2	1	**45**
5 - Central River Division	64	8	6	2	**80**
6 - Upper River Division	57	7	7	1	**72**
Total:	**329**	**81**	**24**	**31**	**465**

Source: Unpublished Education Abstract EMIS DOSE

No. of Schools by Local Government Area (LGA) 2004/2005

Local Gov't Area	Lower Basic	Upper Basic	Basic Cycle	Senior 2nd	Total
1 - Banjul/KMC	45	36	4	23	**108**
2 - Western Division	66	32	14	13	**125**
3 - North Bank Division	61	10	14	4	**89**
4 - Lower River Division	43	4	5	1	**53**
5 - Central River Division	66	8	16	5	**95**
6 - Upper River Division	67	7	10	3	**87**
Total:	**348**	**97**	**63**	**49**	**557**

Source: Unpublished Education Abstract EMIS DOSE

The expansion also affected the non-formal sector. The adult education and literacy programs all over the country have witnessed expansion both geographically and in its coverage/content. Like many third world countries, the Gambia's Adult Literacy programs have been heavily demand driven and dependent on donor supports. There are adult literacy centres established all over the country using the five main dialects i.e. Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Jola and Sarahuli. Even though great efforts and resources have been provided to the literacy level decline, recent preliminary statistics (2003) census is showing that the country's literacy is still stagnant at 37per cent. The expansion recorded especially during the last policy period are yet to have an impact on the literacy, as literacy takes sometimes more than a decade to begin changing trends.

In the area of special education where disadvantaged children are included, the Gambia as a nation and its education sector as a whole achieved great strides. Looking back at the 1965-75 and 1976-86 policies where efforts were confined to training programs for the blind and mute Children, both the just ended 1988-2003 and new education policy 2004-2015 have by contrast included special needs education as priority areas. Thus, the Special Needs Education unit was established within the Basic Education Directorate. In addition, teachers have been trained on various teachings and teaching tools adaptable to children with learning difficulties. Hence rather than always sending them to specialized schools they are today enrolled in the same schools and classes with other children, therefore facilitating their integrations and acceptance by the communities.

3.2 Madrassa

These institutions are regrouped under the umbrella of the general Secretariat for Islamic Arabic Education (GSIAE) and consist of 259 institutions spread all over the country. The secretariat constitutes the official link between the Madrassa proprietors and the Department of State for Education (DOSE) through a Memorandum of Understanding aimed mainly on increasing Access to Quality Education through Madrassa participation. Out of the 259 institutions under the GSIAE, 174 fulfill the criteria for classification as Madrassa.

Number of Institutions by Level and Region 2003						
Regions	ECD	LBS	UBS	BCS	SSS	Total
1	15	10	1	11	7	44
2	22	39	0	12	2	75
3	7	22	0	3	0	32
4	11	18	0	2	1	32
5	8	13	0	1	0	22
6	22	26	0	6	0	54
Total	85	128	1	35	10	259

GSAIE Statistics 2003/04

The above table shows that there are 85 Early Childhood Centers, 128 Lower Basic Schools, 1 Upper Basic (this school has a Senior Secondary component), 35 Basic Cycle (Combination of Lower and Upper Basic) and 10 Senior Secondary Schools. As at the academic year (2003/2004) the 162 Madrassa, that met the criteria for support, enrolled 50903, 3640 and 1200 students respectively at the Lower, Upper Basic and Senior Secondary levels. The tables below show the enrolment and number of institutions by region.

		Enrolment		
LBS Madrasssa Enrolment 2003/04				
Regions	**No. of Madrassa**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
1	30	7602	5606	13208
2	46	8304	6198	14502
3	23	3019	2350	5369
4	17	1791	1523	3314
5	14	1418	1436	2854
6	32	6100	4746	10846
Total		28234	21859	50093

Source: GSAIE Statistics 2003/04

Regions	UBS			SSS		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	1468	574	2042	695	124	819
2	802	394	1196	229	101	330
3	43	27	70	8	2	10
4	33	46	79	15	26	41
5	46	20	66	0	0	0
6	125	62	187	0	0	0
Total	2517	1123	3640	947	253	1200

Source: GSAIE Statistics 2003/04

In terms of Gross Enrolment ratio, the above statistics revealed that the Madrassa institutions constitute 15% of the overall 91% of the Gambia GER at the Lower Basic level. Region 6 has the highest GER of 22% (25% male and 19% Female see table below)

GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) FOR MADRASSA LBS							
Regions	Total	Region1	Region 2	Region3	Region4	Region5	Region6
Both Sexes	15%	16%	17%	10%	23%	4%	22%
Male	17%	19%	19%	11%	23%	4%	25%
Female	13%	14%	15%	9%	22%	4%	19%

Source: GSAIE Statistics 2003/04

A state obligation to provide free and compulsory secondary education was included in the Gambia's 1997 Constitution. The Gambia Government's Education For All National Action Plan reiterated this commitment. The Madrassa aims amongst other at increasing the national literacy rate; providing universal education with increased completion rates and reduced gender disparity; and improving education quality through curriculum reform, teacher training, and assessment reform.

By bringing Madrassa curriculum into the mainstream general education system through the inclusion of the core subjects i.e. Maths, English, SES and Science, the Gambia has recognized the importance and potential of the Madrassa institutions if both the EFA targets and MDGs are to be achieved. Despite constituting 15% of the Lower Basic GER, the madrassa graduates face daunting challenges with respect to job opportunities. The bulk of the Madrassa products are currently engaged in the formal sector as "Kuranic" teachers absorbed in the school system while the rest are combining the latter job with their community "imam ship" function. If one closely observed the statistics on kuranic teachers (Budget 2005), it would be found that all established positions are fully occupied, thus leaving no opportunity for new graduates to be appointed as kuranic teachers. The remaining option is to be appointed as unqualified teachers remunerable only at GMD 520 per month. At community level, the positions of imam are scarce and highly competitive because they

tend to be hereditary leaving no room for others to join this responsibility. As a country the challenge goes beyond recognizing the importance of Madrassa education. The focus should be developing appropriate mechanisms and strategies that will enhance the future of the Madrassa graduates. Therefore for any improved situation and brighter future for Madrassa graduates, linking the madrassa curriculum to the job market needs is an opportunity to explore. This could be considered through a labor market survey.

In pursuit of its mandate to oversee the policy and provide guidance and support to the madrassa structures, the DOSE identified a desk officer to closely work with madrassa institutions and regulate the opening and operations of all non-government schools. The officer is also responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of all madrassa related activities. To ensure that a smooth relationship and link is established, the DOSE encouraged regular dialogues with the madrassa proprietors and gets them invited to any functions/meetings, to which other similar groups or bodies are involved. The Planning Directorate also collect data from madrassa institutions as part of the Annual Education Statistics distinguishing between those that offer the formal school curriculum and those that do not.

3.3   Out of school children

One main challenge faced by the Gambian education system is what approach to adopt with respect to the children whose parents prefer non conventional education commonly known as "Daras". In the Daras, children in addition to their religious lessons, mainly memorization of the Quran, are engaged on the farms of their "Marabouts" (teachers). This type of education is traditional and associated to rural communities in which the formal education system is still associated with colonialism and its effects of converting people into Christianity. Hence, these Daras are still seen as a means to strengthen children's faith while building a prototype Muslim abiding by the teachings of Islam. This phenomenon associated historically to rural areas is becoming an urban phenomenon over the past years. It is now common to meet school going age children in all towns begging in the streets and houses in order to meet the Marabout's needs as well as the students feeding, housing and other necessities. Aware of such phenomenon, both government and NGOs have intervened to provide assistance and minimize the social effects on the future of the affected children. To reach these children it may be necessary to break away from the traditional mode of school delivery. Through the EFA/FTI of the DOSE, it has been suggested to consider the provision of incentives for the parents of such children to ensure their participation in education. This type of education, even though concentrating its teaching around Islamic jurisprudence and theology, enrolls thousands to millions of school/university going age children and youth over the whole West African region. It involves a vast movement of people from the various concerned ethnic group in different countries. Countries such as Mali, Senegal and the Gambia have in one way or the other adopted various strategies to tackle these issues. Whilst in Senegal and Mali the approach was to adopt the "informal education" system, in the Gambia the approach was to adapt only those that are structurally organized using Arabic as a medium of instruction. In the case of Senegal, these institutions even though fully independent from the state are recognized as institutions of learning and support provided by the state both financially and in kind to enable children fully concentrate on their schooling process. For the Gambia to meet both the EFA targets and the MDGs, the inclusion of the "informal education" should be given due consideration and recognition.

If the above mentioned children are provided with an education, the case of those children who really are missing an education or not accounted for at all is and remains worrisome. The type of education to adopt in order to address this issue may vary and could range from literacy, madrassa as well as vocational and technical education and training if the general education system does not suit their needs. For the Gambia to reach all children and achieve both the EFA and MDGs all interventions should be broaden beyond the formal education system to ensure that all school going age children are attending or enrolled in a schooling system. These calls for collective efforts of all stakeholders, especially the NGOs and civil society organizations which should venture to address components omitted or not prioritized by government.

3.4   Key Interventions in the Education Sector

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, adult education was a highly dynamic field associated with innovations, values and practices viewed even by many as relevant and desirable. Approaches, methods and techniques proliferated and literacy campaigns inspired various development efforts i.e. micro credits, farmers support programmes etc. This coincided with the recognition of low participation and enrolment, which researchers have attributed to the lack of parental education. Hence the call to educate specially mothers whom it is believed when educated would definitely groom their progeny to be educated and lead to an educated nation. However, the adult education programs did not yield the much-expected outcomes and mostly once the donor support ended, the initiative collapsed awaiting another donor coming forward and picking the program. The program has was supported by the UNDP, the ADB (i.e. CSIP) and the World Bank through the 3rd Education Sector program.

There are many problems associated with interventions in the field of adult education, amongst them:

➢ Overly ambitious goals and objectives i.e. eradicating illiteracy
➢ Indicators set without any kind of baseline
➢ Some objectives are set for specific groups or target populations

In the formal sector, many interventions have been made, especially at the early childhood, LBS, UBS and SSS. The early childhood education attracted the participation of NGOs, private sector and other individual philanthropies. This analysis will insist on the NGO support and interventions with an emphasis on the CCF initiatives in the Western Division. This organisation has been active since the 1980s contributing mainly in early childhood education, providing support to the children and their mothers as well as the communities in which they stay/live. It is against this context that the support is not only provided to the child but also to their families and to the communities where they stay. This prompted the CCF to initiate its new program of providing micro credit to communities so that they can engage in income generating activities and thereby support their children's education. This enables communities not only to participate in the financing of their children's education but most importantly to own the whole process and not see it as donor driven or CCF imposed initiative.

From the LBS to the SSS, interventions in the area of girl's education have been tremendous. The pioneers are mainly UNICEF, the WB, NGO communities i.e. AATG and private

individuals. These initiatives in one way or the other have made significant impact on the successes at these levels. This contributed heavily in the Gambia's achievement of gender parity at the LBS by 2005. The interventions ranged from scholarships to girls at the LBS and UBS (Dina Said), to scholarships to girls at the SSS (WB, UNICEF, AATG etc) to the girl friendly schools and its affiliates of mother's clubs (UNICEF and FAWEGAM). Whilst the girl friendly initiative and the SSS scholarships are targeting only regions 4, 5 and 6, the Dina Said support has a nation wide coverage. To complement efforts of these stakeholders and to ensure equity, government through PEGEP (the President's Empowerment for Girls Education Project) supported girls' education in regions 1 and 2 in addition to the scholarship scheme provided during the HIPC allocation to regions 1, 2 and 3.

Action Aid the Gambia is always cited and remembered as the organisation that enables thousands of Gambian children to have access to education. Through its 1980s programs, the AATG established and constructed schools mainly in the rural areas where education was not accessible to deprived communities. This success story has seen many teachers hired and thousands of Gambian children from deprived areas enrolled in schools. This intervention was in collaboration and support to government's efforts to universalising access to primary education especially in the provinces, thereby reducing the inequity that prevails since the colonial days. Since the end of the project, teachers, schools and classrooms have been handed over to government. If emulated interventions, such as this, could contribute to the fight against poverty and make government's policies more pro-poor. Hence the pockets where low enrolment are registered, NGOs and other civil society organisations can complement government's efforts to enrol children missing schooling. This it is highly believed would positively contribute to the government's endeavour to reach the EFA targets and attain the MDGs.

Furthermore, interviews were held with 18 different institutions that deal with issues affecting children. Most of these institutions had interventions in the education sector. Interviews were conducted with staff of NGOs, CBOs, UN agencies, children's organizations and certain units at the Department of State for Education. The discussions were centered on their areas of intervention, institutions they collaborate with, their achievements, constraints and best practices and lessons learnt in the course of implementing their programs.

Some of the institutions contacted were found to be intervening in the area of girls' education; others intervene in child protection and care, early marriage, forced marriages, career guidance and sexual harassment. Since most of the institutions were intervening in the education sector, they were found to be collaborating in many areas. They were also collaborating with other institutions like UNICEF, WHO, VSO, PEACE CORPS, NSGA, NAS, Social Security and Housing Finance Cooperation, Standard Chartered Bank, GAMTEL, WEC Mission, American Embassy, the British High Commission/DFID, AFET, and ADWAC among others. Their areas of collaboration included issues of child protection (such as abuse and harassment) and the provision of education to children.

Their major achievement varied but a lot was achieved in the provision of education to children and protection of their rights. For the Department of Social Welfare the setting up of the Children Center at Tallinding was a major achievement, as fifty children are provided with scholarships, medical care and counseling services. For FAWEGAM their major achievement is the sending of 1066 girls to school as well sending 6 girls to university and approving 500 scholarships for girls in Upper Basic Schools. Another major achievement of FAWEGAM is the approval of the project 'operation give them a better life'. This initiative

has afforded 20 girls who had dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy the opportunity to get back to school. Regarding the issue of child protection, CPA has achieved a lot in the area of child protection. Due to their intervention together with other stakeholders national Acts and policies have been developed which are all meant for the protection of the rights of the child in the Gambia. The approval of the Children's Act 2005, the 2003 Tourism Offences Act, the 2003 draft National Policy on Children and the Code of Conduct developed by the media houses on reporting cases pertaining to children are all measures aimed at protecting the interest of the child. These Acts and policies are in line with the provisions of article 2.1 and 2.2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Most of the institutions encountered similar problems. Funding is one of the major constraints for almost all the institutions interviewed. Mobility is another major constraint as well as lack of equipment like computers, generators, photocopiers and fax machines. Lack of enough staff is another constraint for most of the institutions.

Regarding lessons learnt in the course of implementing their programs, most of the institutions highlighted the importance of partnership in the implementation of their programs. Some have even mentioned that without partnership it might be difficult to achieve their objectives. Another lesson learnt by most institutions is that children could contribute to national development if they are adequately supported.

3.5 Government Partners intervening in the Education Sector

As part of this study methodology, the following institutions were visited and their heads interviewed. Findings from discussions with these institutions are summarized below. The institutions are mainly the Adult and non-Formal Education Unit (DOSE), Guidance and Counseling Unit, Girls' Education Unit (DOSE), EMIS Unit (DOSE), Special Education Unit (DOSE), FAWEGAM, CCF, EFA Network, Catholic Education Secretariat, Early Childhood Education Unit, Action Aid, The Gambia, Department of Social Welfare, Youth Ambassadors of Peace and the Child Protection Alliance.

Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFEU)

The head of the unit informed the team that his institution provides technical support to the Department of State for Education in the area of adult literacy targeting persons aged 15 years and above. According to him their programme, particularly, targeted women and girls and their programme were run in five national languages. In addition the unit collaborates with literacy providers and also co-ordinates activities in all regions of the country. They provide training to trainers and also develop training materials for literacy programmes.

As a unit under a government department the ANFEU gets government funding through the recurrent budget but most of their funds are provided by donors such as UNDP which helps with its IFLP, the ADB which helps with the community Skills Improvement Project, UNESCO (BREDA) which supports the programme for children in difficult circumstances, UNICEF that helps with training and provision of materials for the 'mothers clubs' and UNESCO (ISSESCO) which provides capacity building for its facilitators.

The unit collaborates with other institutions in different programme areas all over the country. Notable institutions include WEC Mission, AFET, WACC, ADWAC, OPLA, SAJUKAS community skills, ASCED, ABWE and BAFROW.

Achievements made over the years include the many lives changed either through the health, economic, educational and psycho-social development through active participation especially of women, development of a draft Literacy Policy and the signing of an MOU by the Department of State for Education and Literacy providers. Despite these achievements some constraints were noted. These included the lack of networking and pooling of resources, the inadequacy of learning materials in the centres, the low remuneration provided for the literacy facilitators and the lack of rural libraries to reinforce what is learnt. Funding constraints were also cited, as funds were not available when projects wound up.

The staff of the unit lamented the fact that most of the activities do not continue after project support ended sometimes causing a high drop out rate in the literacy programmes. The limited participation of the men folk in literacy programmes was cited as a problem impeding programme success.

Girls Education Unit (GEU)

The Girls Education Unit is one of many units of the Basic Education Directorate of the Department of State for Education. Asked the areas in which areas this institution intervenes, the head of the unit explained that this unit, as the name implies, was concerned with the education of the girl child (Access, Retention and Performance). She further explained that the unit operates nationally but specifically targets deprived regions of the country which according to UNICEF (the main sponsors) are regions 3, 4, 5, and 6 where girl children are disadvantaged in relation to education. In addition to supporting girls in and out of school the girls education unit also works with women. Through collaboration with FAWEGAM and UNICEF, DOSE established Mother's clubs at community levels to support girls' education.

The main sponsors of the unit's activities are UNICEF, UNESCO/NATCOM, the ADB, which has bought equipment for the unit. Funding constraints were mentioned as a major factor limiting programme implementation. The unit collaborates with FAWEGAM, Peace Corps and the Guidance and Counseling Unit of the DOSE.

Some of the achievements of the unit included the following:-

➢ Increased enrolment of girls especially in the LBS where parity has been reached
➢ Improvements in retention of girls in school
➢ More community participation – the mothers' clubs have impacted positively on girls education
➢ The unit succeeded in increasing awareness on the importance of girls education, especially, among communities that were opposed to it
➢ Succeeded in getting girls aware of the importance of education and the need to be responsible

Despite the above achievements, some constraints were noted. Part of the problem is the fact that all the activities could not be carried out because of limited funding. Other constraints include:-

- Socio-cultural practices such as early marriage. Many incidents of female students forced into marriage were cited as impediments to improving educational attainment among girls.
- Teenage pregnancy was still common and this affected the retention of girls in school.
- Sexual harassment is still a phenomenon that affects girls' education often leading to dropout.
- There were incidences a number of married girls in school (mainly in regions 2 to 6). These young mothers come to school from their husbands' homes and because of this their education is negatively affected as there is limited time to study for these girls.
- The government has drafted a sexual harassment policy and the unit would have loved to see a policy in place that would prevent men marrying girls going to school.

The unit has the following as part of its intervention areas in the future.

- Early and forced marriages and sexual harassment policies put in place to protect girls.
- Institutionalize a re-entry programme for girls who have dropped out of school because of pregnancy or some other reasons.
- Introduce compulsory education for children in all grades (1 – 12)
- Have parity at UBS and SSS

Lessons learnt, include;

- Outstanding among these is the fact that in order for any programme, intervention or national activity to succeed there is need for strong political will i.e. the political authority should give their blessings and support.
- It has also been learnt that for any activity or programme to take off the ground the awareness and participation of the communities is crucial.
- Policies have to be put in place to make our pronouncements a reality

Best Practices

- One of the best practices noted is the support that has been given to the education of girls through the Girls Education Trust Fund. Through this initiative the access and retention for girls has drastically improved since if parents were to continue to meet the cost of fees and books many girls could have dropped out of school.
- Another laudable intervention worthy of mention is the Girl Friendly School Initiative, which seeks to create a welcoming, conducive, safe, and encouraging environment for girls in schools. This has had considerable impact on access and retention in school.
- Under this programme the initiative to encourage female teachers to go on out-posting and serve as role models to rural communities has had a lot of impact on attitude to girls education. This initiative has helped to build the confidence of girls in school.

Guidance and Counseling (G & C)

This institution intervenes in child protection, early marriage, forced marriages, career guidance, career counseling for teachers and students and sexual harassment. The programme is conducted nationally. Monitoring is carried out occasionally and stresses on alternatives to corporal punishment.

The main sources of funding are mainly UNICEF and FTI in collaboration with CPA, NSGA, Girls Education, and Special Education and Early Childhood development units. This unit's activities are constrained by the inadequacy of resources to scale up its activities.

The achievements reported so far include:-
- ➢ All Senior Secondary Schools have teacher counselors and about 90per cent of UBS also have teacher counselors. Guidance and Counseling is also introduced at LBS level
- ➢ The unit was able to collaborate with the CPA and NSGA to increase the awareness of children on their rights and other related issues
- ➢ Conducted informal dissemination workshops for community leaders on CPA issues

This unit had similar constraints with the above. In addition to other constrains, the unit also has funding problems which limits the ability of the institution to reach out to more people and also to meet its logistical requirements. The unit has limited fuel and inadequate equipment to carry out its work satisfactorily.

Its planned intervention areas in the future include

- ➢ Child Protection intervention area.
- ➢ Psycho-social issues
- ➢ Education and career guidance issues

Some of the best practices known for this institution are the fact that:-

- ➢ A lot of people in the upper regions (4, 5 and 6) were reached especially in relation to sexual harassment sensitization.
- ➢ The institution succeeded in networking with other agencies which played an important role in making it easy to work with other agencies.

Forum for African Women Educationalists The Gambia Chapter (FAWEGAM)

FAWEGAM operates nationally but mainly focuses on rural girls and women. Unlike the Women's Bureau it established mothers' clubs to deal with mothers in relation to education. This institution has many sources of funding. Their major funding agencies include UNICEF, the U S Embassy, UNFPA, FAWE (Nairobi), Action Aid the Gambia, GAMTEL, Trust Bank, Guaranty Trust, St. Mary's University, Halifax and the National Aids Secretariat.

The institution collaborates with other agencies such as the Department of State for Education, Department of Social Welfare, Action Aid, the media, Centre for Human Rights, the communities, BAFROW, GAMCOTRAP and TANGO among others in the execution of its duties.

Some of the major achievements of the institution include the sending to school of 1066 girls. Through funding from the American Embassy six girls were sent to university and five hundred more scholarships were approved for girls in the Upper Basic schools. Another achievement is the approval of a project "operation give them a better life" by the FAWE Nairobi office involving the sponsorship of the re-entry of twenty girls who had dropped out of school.

Other achievements include:-
Identifying Sambang Upper Basic School and developing it towards a centre of excellence. Through this initiative, separate toilets were built for both boys and girls and a resource centre was put up as well. In addition to the adequate supply of teaching and learning materials shoes and uniform were bought for both boys and girls from savings. In 2000 there were no female drop-outs and by 2005 the female enrolment was higher than that of males.

Major constraints of the institution were mobility and office space. There is only one vehicle, which could not be used to conduct worthwhile activities. This makes expansion to become difficult. Also though the centre is way off the main road it is not considered a hardship area. Also, there is no guarantee that the teachers trained would stay as the postings policy would require them to move sooner or later.

The institution's plans for the future include supporting more girls in senior secondary and higher education institutions.

The lessons learnt are mainly from the ARI (Accelerated Results Implementation). This has shown that where there are the right people given the right information and adequate resources there would be results.

The EFA Network, a Gambian Civil Society organization, was set up just after the EFA forum held in Dakar in April 2005. The network is mainly funded by the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF), Action Aid the Gambia (AATG) and UNESCO BREDA. The Network is a member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the Africa Network campaign on Education For All (ANCEFA). It is also an active member of the Pro Poor Advocacy Group (Pro PAG) and the Gender Network.

Despite serious financial constraints, the Network has during its short existence been able to sensitize National Assembly members through a campaign during which youth and school children where exposed to the Assembly proceedings. The National Assembly SELECT committee on education was therefore convinced through such campaigns to embark on visiting schools nationwide. These visits resulted in the Network expanding its partnership to institutions and attracting additional funding from Sight Savers, UNESCO NATCOM, GADDOH etc…

Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO The Gambia)

VSO is a development organization that works through volunteers. It has worked in the Gambia since 1960. The Gambia's first Country Strategy ran from 2000 – 2003. VSO the Gambia has three programmes namely Education, Sustainable Rural Livelihoods and Disability.

In the education programme area Volunteers are now being recruited to work alongside rural teachers and educational managers in Central River Division, to support primary teacher training and management at Gambia College and at DoSE headquarters; all of this in VSO's role as joint implementer of the DfID BESPOR project.

Under the sustainable rural livelihood programme area, VSO the Gambia focuses on small business enterprises. In this area it works with partners to empower disadvantaged groups

through skills development, capacity building and diversification of skills. This is not a new area for VSO as it had been working with grassroots organizations since 1998.

To VSO the Gambia the organizations they work with *need to be viable partners – those with good operational track records and committed to addressing the needs of disadvantaged people in rural communities.* Therefore VSO will work in any geographic area where they can identify viable local partners who have needs that VSO can support.

The strategic aim of the disability programme area is to build the capacity of the DPOs (Disabled People's Organisations) so as to improve the organisational and managerial capacities in order that they are more effective in supporting disabled groups. Through this programme the VSO has already established works with:-

G A P D	Gambia Association of Physically Disabled
G P D S A	Gambia Physically Disabled Sports Association
G O L D	Gambia Organization for Learning Difficulties
G O V I	Gambia Organization of the Visually Impaired
R S O D	Rural Support of the Disabled

This Programme Area Plan is based on a joint programme developed by the DPOs and VSO during 2004, known as the VSO-Disabled People's Organizations Disability Programme.

VSO also believes in mainstreaming gender as it believes that addressing gender issues is essential if poverty reduction is to be achieved. A spokesman of the organisation said; '*We choose to work with partners who share our aims and these partners will be expected to support the mainstreaming of gender and to actively work together with VSO in reducing gender inequality'*. Partners and volunteers will be encouraged and supported to be aware of and, where appropriate, address gender issues in their work. VSO globally receives 75per cent of its core funding from DfID.

Early Childhood Development (E C D)

The main objective of the ECD programme is to provide maximum support to young children, their parents and communities with the aim of optimizing the development of young children. It is against this background that the Department of state for Education mandated to administratively coordinate and manage all issues related to education in the Gambia, within the framework of the new education policy 2004/2015 provides supervision, monitoring and evaluation functions to ECD centers in regions 1 through 6. In an attempt to integrate the provision of ECD, a national ECD policy is drafted with the aim to improve the survival and life-chances of Gambian children through a framework which aims to:-

➢ Ensure the integration ECD policies in all development endeavours.
➢ Enlists the support of and creation of a partnership between parents, families, civil society and the government in order to expand and improve ECD provision.
➢ Secure adequate financial provision for the implementation of the policy.

With the continuous support of UNICEF, CCF, the WB and other agencies, government has provided all stakeholders an enabling environment where they can invest in preschool and ECD.

Christian Children's Fund (CCF)

CCF is intervening in the field of education in 36 countries worldwide. It has regional structures in four (4) West African countries namely Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. In the Gambia CCF is mainly intervening in 29 communities in western division in an outreach program aimed at sponsoring children to enable both the child and the communities' development. This program mainly targets children in Lower Basic Schools and ECDs in addition to learning materials and supplies provided to schools and centers where sponsored children are attending. In developing its new program, CCF engaged communities in its strategic planning process. Participants agreed that children from poor background are bound to be malnourished and eventually would not have access to education. Hence the new program adopted a multi-disciplinary approach within which education officers, parents and teachers discussed education issues within the context of poverty. Communities organized through established CBO, CCF assisted communities to generate income and engage in sustainable activities that will enable poverty reduction whilst providing all children of school going age the opportunity to access educational facilities.

Education Management Information System (EMIS)

The Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) was introduced within the Department of State for Education (DOSE) and was working well since its inception in the academic year 1999/2000. It was supported through the UK DFID supported Education Management Project (EMP) which was aimed at strengthening the education sector's management information system with the main objective of collecting, analyzing and disseminating timely, accurate and quality data aimed at informing decision making.

The data collection system of DOSE prior to the EMIS introduction was EXCEL based, while the EMIS is built with ACCESS software, a Microsoft data base application. This required training of EMIS staff to enable them to modify the source code so that the EMIS team can update the data entry screens and retrieval of reports as demanded. It is important to remember that both the data collection instrument and demand from decision and policy makers changed from time to time. It is equally important that the EMIS personnel are able to produce the kind of data set ready for release as final version (including teacher data and GIS map). The EMIS needs to produce this kind of data sets on a regular basis every year.

EMIS staff need to develop skills on access through on the job training. In order to achieve the EMIS goals it was imperative to develop an Education Management Information System (EMIS), as a basis to enhance sound educational planning and decision-making.

As part of its human resources development strategy DOSE has been using important information collected by EMIS on the teachers' data base to carry out posting and allocate scholarships for further training.

Department of Social Welfare

The Department of Social Welfare intervenes in three different areas: Child Care, that deals with children's education by providing sponsorships to the underprivileged children. They also dealt with other issues affecting children like maintenance and adoption. The department also has an adult care unit that deals with the elderly by providing shelter for them as well as assistance. They also support people with disabilities by providing them with technical aids like wheelchairs, crutches and artificial limbs. These vulnerable persons are also assisted to engage in income generating activities like selling of scratch cards. They are also assisted to secure loans to engage in incoming generating activities to support them.

One of major the achievements of the department is the OVC and the Sexual Exploitation studies. Before these surveys were conducted the magnitude of the problem was based on anecdotal evidence but with these findings the depth of the problem is understood and measures are being taken to support these groups.

 Another achievement of the department is the Child Center at Tallinding. About 50 children are provided with scholarships, medical care and counseling services. This center is meant to support street children and other under privileged children. The center operates morning and afternoon shifts. Those who go to school in the morning go to the center in afternoon and vice versa.

Regarding lessons learnt during the implementation of their programmes, they have reported the importance of partnership with stakeholders to ensure the success of their programmes.

Most of their achievements were attained with the support with the support of their partners. Successful completion of the studies they conducted, sponsorship of children and the maintenance of the rehabilitation center for people with disabilities were all accomplished with the support of partners.

Another lesson learnt is the need to capacitate staff of the department, as some of them lack the necessary skills to function effectively. Therefore, the department has in collaboration with the MDI, GTTI, Gambia College and University of the Gambia developed a diploma in social work program to provide much needed skills in social work in The Gambia. This programme also seeks to collaborate with UK based institutions in running the programme.

Regarding the best practices in their area of intervention, they reported the Child Center as one of their best practices in their intervention areas. Similarly, from the studies they conducted they were able to gauge the magnitude of the problems of orphanhood and vulnerable children, the rate at which children are being exploited and abused as well as the needs of the disabled children particularly in mainstream schools.

Youth Ambassadors of Peace

The Youth Ambassadors of Peace reported that they educate people on peace and train young people so that they can develop a culture of peace, as they are the most vulnerable in times conflict.

Regarding their major achievements, they reported their peace programme (APPM) as a major achievement with two hundred people trained and certified on peace. They have also trained about 50 people in Senegal on peace. The has also been expanded as now they have 11 people on their payroll and with staff in LRD overseeing NBD, those in URD oversee CRD as operational zones as well as Banjul, Kanifing and Western Division. They have also changed people's perception of peace that it did only mean the absence of war or conflict. They were able to bring 18 chiefs and their badge messengers for five days training on peace.

Regarding lessons learnt in the course of implementing their programmes, they observed that people's understanding of peace is negative and lamented the absence of a course in peace in the school curriculum. They reported that youths could contribute significantly to national development if they are supported. Finally, they indicated that the entire population needed to be sensitized on peace for the betterment of the country.

Regarding their best practices, they reported their peace education programme in schools (APPM) as their best practice, as it made children understand that without peace, there would be no development, as peace does not only mean the absence of conflict.

Child Protection Alliance

Regarding their areas of intervention, they have reported protection of children in the school environment. Ensuring that the school environment is conducive so that the children will not be in a state of fear whilst in their educational pursuit. They also work towards ensuring that children are retained in school particularly girls who most of the time are victims of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

They also work towards ensuring that children have access to basic and quality education, and they are not subject to sexual harassment and corporal punishment that could affect their performance in school.

Regarding their major achievements, they reported that people now have a clear understanding of Child Rights and many changes have taken place regarding the protection of children. They also reported that certain Acts have come into force that protects the rights of the Child. The Children's Act 2005, the 2004 Tourism Act, the 2003 draft National Policy on Children, the Code of conduct developed by the media houses on reporting cases pertaining to children were notable achievements of the CPA. They also identified the establishment of 24 voice clubs in CRD, NBD and URD as major achievements.

Regarding their best practices and lessons learnt, they have reported that people's understanding of child protection and rights is still low and CPA alone cannot do it and there is a need for stronger partnership and other institutions to come on board.

Regarding their best practices in their area of intervention, they have reported child participation programmes like 'the voice of the young' as one of their best practices in their intervention areas. Due to the success of their programmes they are often invited to other countries in the sub-region so that they could replicate programmes of this nature. Another best practice is the participatory approach of dealing with child protection issues.

3.6 Enrolment

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD)

The DOSE is involved in ECD only at the level of co-ordination of donor input and some level of training for care givers. It has maintained an interest in ensuring that all ECD establishments operate according to prescribed standards. The DOSE has instituted a series of initiatives to increase the effectiveness of privately run pre-schools. Through this co-operation a diagnostic evaluation of ECD centers have been completed and a curriculum and a syllabus are being designed. However ECD initiatives are largely confined in the urban and peri-urban areas. There is a lack of effective supervision of the operations of existing centers, training of the care givers is inadequate and data on Enrolment is limited while program coverage at ECD centers are largely pre-school activities as opposed to a complete package on the holistic development of the child. It is necessary to strengthen the capacity of the DOSE to oversee, advise and control the development of appropriate ECD services for children of pre-school years throughout the Gambia; develop linkages and partnership between communities (especially in rural areas and between communities and relevant government departments, NGOs and donor agencies for optimum and effective utilization of available resources; encourage the development and sustainability of ECD activities; address the general needs and rights of children 0 to 6 years and promote the roles of family and communities in early childhood programs to strengthen their responsibilities in this area.

Under the expanded vision of basic education, pre school education is provided to children aged between 3 and 6. According to the Gambia's EFA 2000 assessment only 46% of the urban children and less than 17% of rural children have access to this level of education. This is mainly attributed to the high cost of fees and parental inability to meet these costs. Such

provision, in the form of pre-schools is almost completely provided by the private sector. The Gambia has a high population growth rate rising from an estimation of 325,000 at independence to 1,360,861 (2003 census) with an annual growth rate of 2.8%. Like in the 1993 census data, the population has a young age structure which shows that nearly half of the population is less than 18 years of age, one fifth aged 0-5 years, 21% aged 3-8 years and 24% aged 6-14 years.

The DOSE currently supervises 3 specialized schools, all of which are located in GBA with a long waiting list that can not effectively cater for the children with special needs. However, DOSE is advocating through the education policy, an inclusive strategy not yet fully implemented. Children with special needs are encouraged to attend ECD facilities even though some of the facilitators are not trained to handle them.

Stakeholders in ECD range from children, parents and families/households to communities, civil society organizations including local and International NGOs (CCF, CRS etc…), donor agencies (UNICEF etc…) and Central Government (Department of Community Development, DOSH, National Nutrition Agency (NaNA), Social welfare etc…).

Lower Basic and Upper Basic Schools

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and the Net Enrolment ratio (NER) are the most common indicators used to measure participation and enrolment of the school going age population. These two indicators are heavily dependent on the population estimates. Whilst the GER covers total enrolment regardless of age brackets, the NER concentrates only on the school age brackets. The NER points at the percentage of children entitled to be enrolled and who are currently enrolled. This is very important as an indicator because it shows the percentage of the school going age population that are not enrolled or missing education. Currently, with a projected population estimates, it is estimated that the Lower Basic Schools NER stands at 70 per cent, whilst that of Upper Basic Schools (UBS) is at 59per cent and Senior Secondary School (SSS) 19per cent. This shows that 30per cent of children within the age bracket of school enrolment are not in school at the LBS, whilst 41per cent and 81per cent of the UBS and SSS schooling age population are currently not enrolled. These represent a significant portion of the Gambian children whom even though constitutionally are entitled to an education are denied education. Hence if the Gambia is to reach its EFA targets and attain the MDGs, there is high need to concentrate efforts and support to this portion of the children.

All stakeholders and government should join their efforts to track these children and ensure that they are engaged in the formal or Madrassa institutions thereby enabling the country to reach both the EFA and the MDGs. Figure 1.1 below shows the gross enrolment ratio trends by sex. It could be realised that though nationally a high GER was realised which can be explained through the expansion in the sector (more schools built) the girls had a higher GER which at this time were far behind the boys. It could be recalled that the pillars of this third education policy (1988 – 2003) was *access, relevance and quality education especially for women and girls.*

This picture is clearer in figure 1.2 below which shows NER by gender.

Figure 1.1: Gross Enrolment Ratio Trends by Sex - 91/92 to 98/99

A line chart titled "Figure 1.1: Gross Enrolment Ratio Trends by Sex - 91/92 to 98/99" showing three series (Both Sexes, Male, Female) across years 91/92 to 98/99. Male starts at 70.0, rises to 74.6, then 77.8. Both Sexes starts at 59.0, rises to 65.0, then 71.7. Female starts at 47.9, rises to 55.3, then 65.6.

Figure 1.2: NER trends by gender- 91/92 to 98/99

A line chart titled "Figure 1.2: NER trends by gender- 91/92 to 98/99" showing three series (Both Sexes, Male, Female) across years 91/92 to 98/99 on the Year axis, with values ranging from about 20.0 to 50.0.
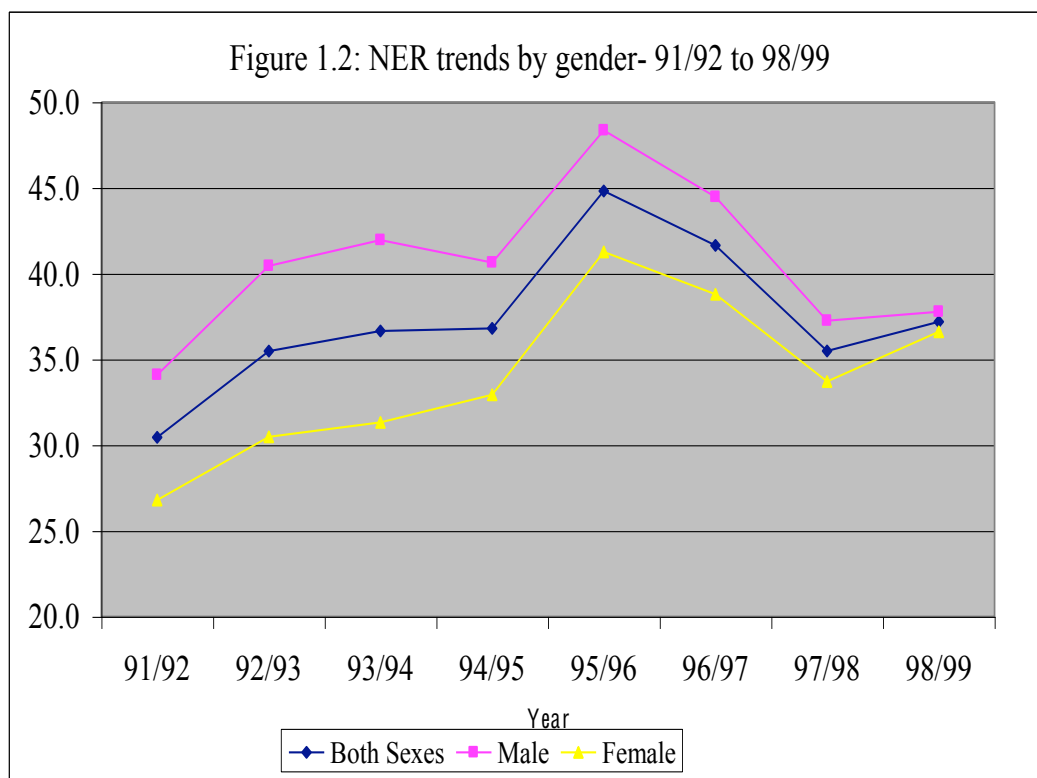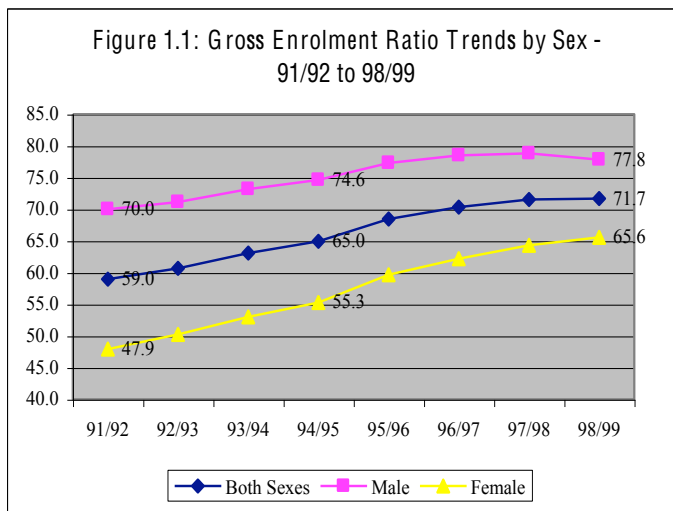
Figure 1.3 below attempts to explain a national picture. The high repetition from 1991 to 1996 is very significant. The mid-term and mid-decade review in 1995 recommended the nine-year uninterrupted basic education in which every child should be promoted to the next grade upon satisfactory completion of the lower grade's work. This greatly reduced the screening that schools otherwise took to ensure that they had good results at the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE). As is clear by 1998 the repetition rate was greatly reduced.

Figure: 1.3 Average Repetition Rates, 91/92 to 97/98
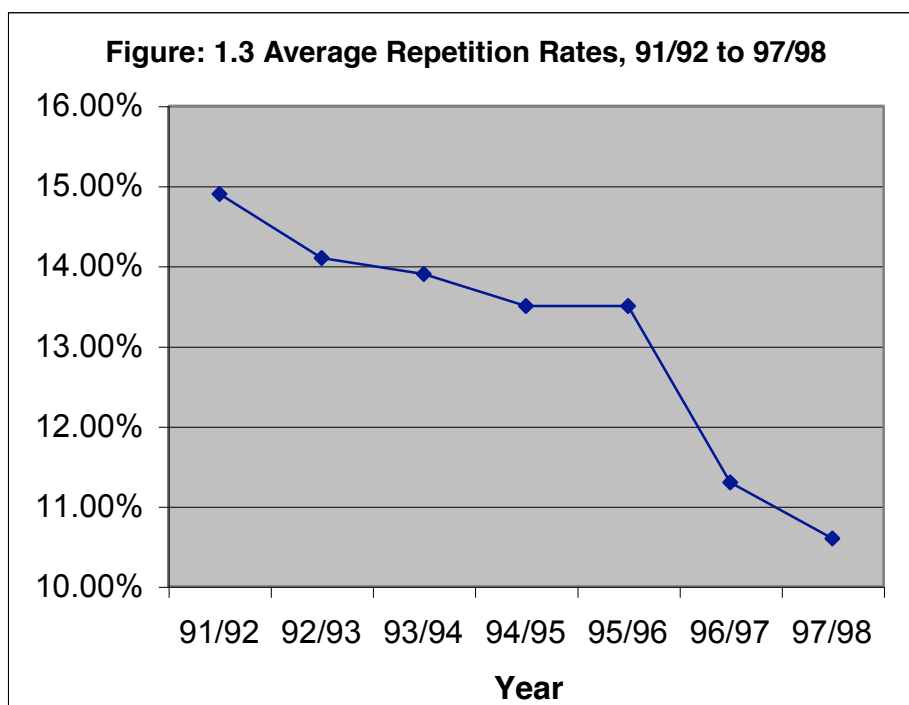
The increase in enrolment has been particularly striking especially for girls as already mentioned above. Whilst girls' enrolment grew at an annual average growth rate of 6per cent and that of boys grew only by 2per cent. This significantly impacted on the girls GER which increase from 61per cent (1996) to 79per cent (2004/05). By contrast, Boys GER has been fluctuating over the same period and declined to 75 per cent (2004/05) from 82 per cent (1998)

For the UBS, both boys and girls' enrolment grew quite fast due to the rapid expansion in this area. Whilst enrolment of boys increased from 49per cent (2001/02) to 66per cent (2004/05), that of girls grew from 32per cent to 65per cent over the same period. At the SSS level, the GER, which was very low (9per cent) in 1990 rose to 26per cent by 2004/05 reflecting the priority government places on the secondary education.

These achievements at the basic and secondary level have been accompanied by sound policies, which have been continuously built upon the achievements of previous policies and avoiding errors and mistakes committed therein.

The early childhood education can also boast of serious progress. The last period (1988-2003) has witnessed the formulation and drafting of the early childhood policy submitted for approval to the Cabinet. Even though up to date no reliable data on early childhood is available, it can be argued that early childhood provision has expanded rapidly all over the country especially in the Greater Banjul Area. This achievement is mainly attributed to the sound and friendly partnership and collaboration between providers and government that created the enabling environment.

Special Education

According to results of the 1998 National Disability Survey Results, more than two out three disabled children aged 4-18 years were not currently attending mainstream or Madrassah School at the time of the survey. This survey found that disabled female children are either

not sent to school (mainstream or Madrassah school) or if they went to school they dropped out in much larger numbers than males. The findings of the survey show that the disabled girl-child is in a much more disadvantageous situation when it comes to education than the 'normal' girl-child. Of the disabled children who ever attended school 51.7 per cent attended mainstream schools, 2.4 per cent attended specialized institutions, 5.0 per cent madrassah, 39.3 per cent Dara and 0.2 per cent nursery school.

The plight of disabled children regarding attendance of school can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, there is a social dimension to disabled children being denied access to education. In general, society considers the disabled as people who have little to contribute to society and are often relegated to beggars with no opportunity to attend school to enable them fully realize their potentials. Due to such negative attitudes, most disabled children are not sent to school. Secondly, there are only three special schools (schools for the disabled) in the Gambia and these schools are located in the Kanifing Municipal Area. In view of the need for support most disabled living far away from these schools cannot access these schools and are therefore not catered for. The situation of the disabled is aggravated by the fact that existing mainstream schools do not have in place adequate infrastructure and trained personnel to address the needs of the disabled.

Government recognizes the right of disabled persons to have equal access to educational opportunities, available in the country, including advanced studies for those with the aptitude to do so. Special education is not only an issue for schools and teachers who look after children with disabilities, but also a whole system approach that touches the whole nation in its drive to include all inhabitants in every aspect of responsible civic life. Therefore there is need for the Gambian populace to adopt radical and holistic changes of attitudes and misconceptions about persons with disabilities to ensure that they too have access to quality education. In this regard, the Gambia adopted complementary and mutually supportive approaches that are based on the principles of inclusiveness, integration and participation of children with special needs will be encouraged whilst a school friendly environment will be promoted.

The inclusion of children with mild disabilities in mainstream schools is now a reality in schools in the Gambia. Despite these results, a great mount of support and adaptation is required especially in terms of school facilities and classroom structures that best suit the needs of disadvantaged children. The existing special schools will need to be strengthened and new ones built taking into account the high demand. This will enable these schools fulfill their functions as centers for outreach services for those with severe disabilities and staff in the mainstream schools.

Accordingly, the DOSE set up a Special Education Unit under the Basic Education Directorate (BED) responsible for the co-ordination of all interventions and programs for this category of the school aged population in conjunction with all other relevant directorates, agencies and partners. The Unit keeps a register of disabled children in the formal system and those in especially difficult circumstances while the Gambia College develops training modules, for pre-and in-service training of teachers in the mainstream.

There are three special education institutions in The Gambia: the School for the Blind opened in 1971, St. John's School for the Deaf which opened in 1984 and a special class for children with learning difficulties at the Methodist Primary school. These grant-aided schools also receive support from philanthropic and religious organizations or individuals.

4. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR

This chapter attempts at highlighting the strength and weaknesses of the education system across all levels.

4.1 Strengths

In the Gambia, there exists conducive policy and legal environment for the attainment of the desired levels of education. The policy framework exists for the attainment of quality education. Impediments to the attainment of the goals of successive policies and programs has been resource limitations and to an extent the absence of adequate institutional structures to implement such policies. Much more resources need to be put into the education sector to ensure that policies and programs are more effectively implemented. It is in this line that the Third Education Sector Program (TESP) initiated since 1998 the establishment of schools in many parts of the country which has tremendously increased access to education to many. A lot has been achieved in improving access to educational institutions over the past decade. Over the years the dominance of government in the education sector has been drastically reduced. A conducive environment has been created by government for the private sector and NGOs to invest in education, hence reducing the burden on government. Although such a development has added impetus to government's drive to increase access to education, use of such facilities is beyond reach of many due to the high costs associated with private schools. Evidence has shown that in terms of quality the private schools have out performed both government and mission schools, especially at the primary and middle school levels. This can be explained by the quality of teaching staff that private schools are able to attract and the fact that class size in private schools are much smaller and more manageable than classes in public schools. There is an increasing need to improve service conditions in public schools to attract the relevant expertise to the teaching career. Until the requisite standards are met in public schools there is need for government to look into the hiking costs in private schools with a view to making them more accessible to the public.

The project Coordination Unit (PCU) of the DOSE was established to ensure a consistent level of co-ordination and planning in the utilization of resources allocated to the sector. Both the recurrent and development expenditures have been tied to the Gambia Government policy pronouncements reflected through programs and projects on the ground. Thus investment programs tend to support the priority programs of the education sector. The bulk of development expenditure (85%-95%) is financed through external support while the public investment constitute an average of 10% of the total as counterpart funding. This reflects a great level of cooperation and complementarities between the Gambia government and its development partners.

The Gambia is signatory to numerous conventions and declarations aimed at the promotion of education. Most of these conventions have been ratified locally and relevant local legislation reviewed and amended to ensure that they do not conflict with international conventions. One can safely conclude that legislative provisions in The Gambia, including the 1997 Constitution (Section 30), have adequately provided for children's right to education. Laws and conventions to which The Gambia is signatory provides for access to education for all without segregation. It is common knowledge that girls in The Gambia are some times victims of segregation when it comes to school attendance and are either denied access or withdrawn from school at an early stage of their schooling. Such a practice as indicated earlier is premised on culture and religion. Despite the legal provisions, which protect the interest and welfare of all children, segregation across gender continues to be practiced. This

is because despite the existence of appropriate legislation, the relevant administrative structures do not exist to enforce such laws. There may however be more to the problem than the absence of these structures. Enforcing universal access to education requires the mandatory provision of such services. In the face of limited public funds to meet the cost of universal access to educational facilities, it remains to be seen how government can enforce the enrolment of all children in school.

Improving enrolment and retention of girls in school remains a critical challenge to the education sector in The Gambia. There may still be room for improving access to educational facilities to address this problem but what may be of much more concern is increasing efforts at cost reduction. At the macro level, there is an urgent need to address the problem of unemployment, which continues to serve as a disincentive for sending children to school. Creating more public sector jobs may not be a realistic measure to propose in light of current adverse economic conditions. Hence government adopted an appropriate and sustainable measure by reviewing the curriculum with a view to providing graduates with relevant skills that will enable them engage in informal sector economic activities. Such a measure would make the curriculum relevant to national needs and reduce unemployment. The University of The Gambia and vocational schools have pivotal mandatory roles in the realization of this objective.

Prior to the 2004-2015 Education Policy, the DOSE had not taken a precise, official decision on a guiding theory on school organization that embraces aspects of democracy, human rights and peace education. Consequently the new Policy (2004-2015) set the enabling environment to support school effectiveness, improvement as well as democratic schooling, accordingly lessons learnt from the African continent and other parts of the world will inform school organizational procedures as they affect: participatory leadership, shared vision, teamwork, the learning environment, the teaching learning process, expectations, reinforcement, monitoring and enquiry, pupils' rights and responsibilities and partnership and support. Schools are encouraged to inculcate values and principles of democracy, human rights and peaceful coexistence and through practice not through precept. Therefore, simulation or mock structures reflective of those within the larger community will provide a suitable tool or conduit in this regard. For instance, elected school councils will be made mandatory for each school; grievance procedures set up; children's parliament established; partnership and synergies forged; child welfare centers set up to advocate and monitor child rights and the promotion of peace and democratic practice. Indicators will be developed to assess school compliance to these measures. (Gambia EFA Action Plan April 2004)

It is worth noting that legal provisions exist in the 1997 Constitution that protect children from exploitation and also regulate the nature of work that the child can perform, the institutional framework to enforce these provisions are largely inadequate. There are, however, interventions aimed at protecting children from exploitations but the biggest challenge facing such initiatives is the general lack of recognition of the draw backs of child labour in the development of the child. It is essential for the general populace to recognize the thin line between the economic exploitation of children and the concept of socialization for such initiatives to have desired effect of promoting the welfare of children. With increasing poverty and unemployment, the task of encouraging the poor, particularly, to forego the economic gains of engaging the child in some gainful employment rather than avail the child the opportunity to go to school for its development is becoming an uphill task. It is increasingly making more economic sense to the poor to encourage the economic input of their children in the immediate future rather than invest their meagre household resources in

the education of children whose future is bleak in a country plagued with high unemployment amongst school leavers. It is against this background that government through DOSE engage upon "Big Bang" campaigns aimed at sensitising communities on the right of children to attend school but also on the benefits of educating children on the national agenda.

4.3 Weaknesses

A major challenge the education sector is faced with is the problem of promoting the retention of girls in school. It has been observed that many girls dropout of school before reaching the secondary level. Evidence has shown that gender disparities in enrolment increase as children progress to higher levels of education. This is associated with girls being withdrawn from school for marriage or having to leave school because they got pregnant. High education costs have also contributed to girls dropping out of school with many parents preferring to finance boys' education instead of girls at the higher level. Although the introduction of the Girls' Scholarship Scheme, which is aimed at offsetting part of the educational cost on girls, might have had some influence on the retention of girls, it is apparent that the tradition of early marriage continues to negate efforts at improving retention of girls in school. There is need, therefore, to intensify efforts to change attitudes to girls' education and promote the status of women with a view to increasing the realization that women can contribute more to the development of society than is believed in traditional society.

Notwithstanding the gains made in access to educational facilities, a significant proportion of children remain out of school for various reasons. Impediments to school attendance as presented in this analysis relate to structural inadequacies within the education sector which limit access to education and socio-economic factors which negatively influence school attendance. It has been observed that the main impediment to school attendance in The Gambia is poverty. Poverty has been seen to directly and indirectly influence school attendance. For the poor there is a tradeoff between their children's school attendance and the much-needed economic contribution of these children in the household economy. With increasing levels of poverty in the country the poor are inclined to opt for tapping their children's labor rather than sending them to school. Such a choice is more likely to affect girls more than boys in view of the existing dichotomy in roles across gender. To consolidate gains made in the education sector and further reach out for those out of school children, there is need for concerted efforts aimed at changing attitude to formal education, in general, and girls' education in particular. Until the populace recognizes the child's right to education and the value that education adds to the child in making them more productive in their communities, the attainment of education for all in The Gambia will remain a dream.

Another challenge of The Gambia's education system is the quality and relevance of education. During the first half of the policy period (1988-2003), there were no targets set for learning outcomes and the only available measure of achievement was the success rate of individual schools and candidates at selective entrance examinations at the end of grades 6 and 9. As a result, benchmarks were set to clearly define learning outcomes at the lower basic for quality assessment while the annual National Assessment Test (NAT) using a sample size of 25per cent of pupils in grades 3 and 5 was institutionalized to inform the system on pupils' performance at the lower basic level. There is growing demand for the need to improve the learning achievements of children, which were met by only 10per cent and 6.7per cent of a sample size of 25per cent of Grade 4 students in the areas of English and Mathematics respectively (The Gambia MLA Study 2000). Such

alarming low achievement levels mostly affect the rural schools, which continue to attract fewer trained teachers. In addition, poor housing conditions and inadequate incentives for teachers are factors responsible for the poor retention of trained and qualified teachers in rural areas. Considerations will have to be given to the status and welfare of teachers to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

The issue of quality and relevance of the curriculum and learning materials has been a concern for teachers and parents alike. Hence the curriculum at the level of basic education has been revised with emphasis on the strengthening of school-based assessment system in order to make it more relevant to the learning needs of children. It is envisaged that this will be done in collaboration with the involvement of the communities through school management committees and Parent teachers Associations (PTA) for monitoring and supervision purposes.

Although a lot has changed in terms of educational costs, the 1998 National Poverty Survey also established that household economic status is an important determinant of school attendance. This survey established that access to and participation in education is very low for those in the poorer categories in rural areas. According to results of this survey, male net enrolment in primary school for the non-poor was estimated at 60.7 per cent while that of the extremely poor was 43.8 per cent. The comparative figures for female net enrolment in primary school are 61.7 per cent and 39.7 per cent for the non-poor and extreme poor respectively. It can be observed that the disparities in enrolment across poverty categories is even wider for girls implying that girls in extremely poor households are less likely than boys to attend school. This survey further indicates that of the school age children (7-25 years) not attending formal school 70 per cent were from extremely poor household and only 18 per cent from non-poor households.

The 1998 Poverty Survey results also showed that for children of primary school going age (7-13 years) who never attended school, 18 per cent of males and 20 per cent of the female considered attending school too expensive. Similar findings were made in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2000). Results of this survey showed that children in households in the richest quintiles were more likely to be attending school than those in the poorest (72.2 percent for the rich household and 33.3 per cent for the poor households). School attendance of parents was also found to be a determinant of school attendance. Even vulnerable children such as street children who never went to school singled out cost of education as a major reason for not attending school. Street children who dropped out of school advanced the same reason[1].

Results of the 1993/94 Community Education Survey results revealed that many rural parents were apprehensive of sending their children to school for fear of loosing much needed farm labour. In view of the labour intensive nature of agriculture in The Gambia rural communities treasure the input of their children on their farms. Probably due to increasing youth unemployment at the time of the survey, there was a general feeling amongst respondents of the survey that since the job market could not supply jobs to school leavers there was no wisdom in sending their children to school at the double cost of losing the child's labour and also incurring financial costs in educating the child. In view of the intractable problem of job creation, which is influenced by external factors, the Survey concluded that in the short term

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[1] *Street Children in The Gambia, 1995*

what may be feasible is to look at the possibilities of lowering the expenses of formal education.

In The Gambia the issue of child labour may be quite controversial. Whereas in many countries the involvement of children in work is mainly premised on economic reasoning, in The Gambia children's work can in most cases be seen as part of the process of socializing them. There may be tradeoffs between school attendance and gains from child labour when children are involved in some form of labour for extended periods of time. This situation becomes acute when perceived gains from child labour outweigh the importance attached to education. Results of MICS II (2000) revealed that children living in households in the poorest quintile (40 per cent) were nearly four times more likely to be working than those from households in the richest quintiles (10.5 per cent). On the other hand, children in predominantly rural areas were more likely to be engaged in work than those in urban areas. These observations partly explain disparities in school attendance across regions and poverty categories.

The practice of early marriage is inimical to the ideal of education for all. Gambian society, premised on national tradition and religion, continue to practice early marriage, especially amongst girls. Many girls are married within the ages of 13-17 years. Consequently, girls are often either denied school attendance or are prematurely withdrawn from school and married. In the recent past a new phenomenon, teen-age pregnancy, has considerably affected the educational attainment of girls. This new phenomenon has significantly influenced parental opinion on girls' education due to societal rebuttal of pregnancy out side marriage. In the 1993/94 Community Education Survey, most parents who opposed the education of girls felt that girls were exposed to the risk of pregnancy; hence it made more sense to send boys to school since they had better chances of completing school.

Arranged marriages are considered essential in the social structure of the Gambian village[2]. Many rural parents are apprehensive of losing control over the timing of marriage and choice of partners for their daughters if they acquired education to secondary level. Mainly for these reasons successive studies including the 1998 National Poverty Study and MICS II (2000) have identified girls as a disadvantaged group in the area of education both in terms of admission and retention in school. Research has found that continuing education beyond primary level is a problem for many categories of children. The group of children that are affected the most are those from extremely poor families, street children, the disabled and handicapped children, and girls who are often betrothed at an early age or withdrawn from school as a result of parental concerns regarding the potential for such children getting pregnant whilst in school[3].

Religious misconceptions and cultural beliefs also militate against school attendance. Studies conducted in the country have found that a number of respondents who opposed western

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[2] *1993-94 Community Education Survey*
[3] *Situational Analysis of Women and Children, 2000*

education based their reasons on religious and cultural grounds. Results of the 1993/94 Community Education Survey results showed that in general, a perception existed that sending children to formal schools provides obstacles to the common socialization into traditional norms and values. Since many rural parents were interested in maintaining morals among their children they mentioned the following as disadvantages of Western education;

- ➢ School children become disrespectful;
- ➢ They do not greet elders;
- ➢ They do not listen to elders;
- ➢ They become disobedient, strong-headed and independent.

Over the years there has been a proliferation of Madrassa's (Arabic Schools). These have served as an alternative to western educational institutions to parents who oppose western education for moral reasons. The 1998 Household Poverty Survey results indicated that Madrassa's cost less than western schools and some parents, including those from the non-poor, still prefer to send their children to such schools especially so for the girl-child for moral and religious reasons. Although these schools have the potential to produce graduates who can realize their full potentials, some schools may be under funded and lack the capacity to impart the requisite quality education for the benefit of their students, in particular, and the nation at large. Since the medium of instruction in these schools is Arabic, job opportunities for their graduates are becoming a problem in the country.

5. QUALITY, ACCESS, RELEVANCE, EQUITY AND EFFICIENCY ISSUES IN THE GAMBIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

It is universally agreed upon that the provision of basic education is one of the most effective means of fighting or reducing poverty. But one needs to agree that it is not any kind or type of education. It should be an education with quality and relevance.

Quantitative data in itself is not adequate to give a good picture of the situation of schooling. Having sufficient classrooms, textbooks, teachers and pupils does not give us a picture of the kind of education provided. These are necessary but insufficient conditions for good education. The most important feature of education is how these different variables – buildings, teachers, pupils and teaching resources – combined could contribute to the delivery of quality learning and teaching. One needs to *"measure"* classroom interaction between these variables to build a picture of the kind of education provided. Consequently, it is this element that is most important in enhancing the skills, aptitudes and values that will enable them to thrive and contribute to development.

In a rapidly changing social context, young people who graduate from school need much more than a school leaving certificate and the ability to analyze facts in examinations. Nor are there ready-made jobs for those who complete primary or secondary schooling. Rather, young people today need to be able to analyze the world, evaluate options and create solutions. This will require skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, working together, dealing with conflict and being resourceful in constrained circumstances. They will also need to learn critical values such as democratic decision-making, transparency, questioning authority and mutual respect.

The issues of access, equity and quality/relevance however being intertwined have to be looked at in totality in an integrated manner, and the strategies to address them must also look at the key areas simultaneously, not in a piecemeal fashion.

5.1 Early Childhood Education

5.1.1 Access

The formulation of an early childhood framework through multi-sectoral approach and the inclusion of the 0-3 years as well as the expansion of early childhood to cover children from 0-8 years is a step towards expanding access to education for all children. This innovative approach includes nutrition programs and covers the children and their immediate peers and mothers. Through this approach to early childhood it is expected that when functional would allow a wider coverage thus enabling more children within this age bracket to get enrolled. This would lead to a higher Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios (GER and NER), which at the moment stands at very low level.

5.1.2 Equity

Children aged 0-8 years from rural, poor and less privileged households and communities would through this initiative be accorded chances to access the same level of education as other children do. This equity challenge would enable the Gambia to ensure equal access opportunities to all children regardless of their socio-cultural background.

5.1.3 Quality

For the time being no standards are set to measure the outcomes from the ECDs. There are no final examinations but children are exposed to some kind of assessment of their abilities to read, count and write basic things. The teaching force through which quality can be attained is now being institutionalized at the teaching college. Arrangements are made with support from UNICEF to train ECD facilitators to qualified level, hence ensuring that quality teaching takes place that in turn is expected to trickle down to quality learning.

5.2 Lower Basic Education

5.2.1 Access

Since the provision of universal basic education has been recognized by the Gambian constitution as the government's responsibility, it is of extreme importance that ways and means of bringing all school going age children to attend school be strategically found and adhered to. The estimated Gambian NER at this level is 67per cent (2002). That means, in 2002, 30 percent of all children of the Gambia aged 7-12 did not have access to lower basic education.

5.2.2 Equity

Children from extremely poor households (urban and rural), physically and mentally handicapped, residents of inaccessible or hard to reach rural areas and out of school children should not be excluded from the provision of lower basic education.

5.2.3 Quality

There exists at present a mechanism for assessing learning achievement at lower basic level. The National Achievement Test (NAT) and Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) have revealed low mastery level. This can hardly be called satisfactory. These poor and unsatisfactory results are not only confined to rural areas, as quality of primary education registered a marked decline in urban areas. Children from poorer families obviously seem to suffer most from the above declining standard of education in lower basic schools.

5.2.4 Relevance

Despite necessary reforms in the lower basic curriculum and the expansion of the scope for lower basic education to play pivotal role in the national economy, little or no significant improvement in terms of quality has been registered and hence failed to contribute little to enhance relevance.

5.2.5 Efficiency

Although the drop out and repetition rates are quite low, on average it is found that quite a number of students complete their lower basic education while their ages are well above the official schooling age bracket (7-12). This reveals that many children may enroll in grade one while more than 7 years. This indicates a poor or low efficiency of the system.

5.3 Secondary Education

5.3.1 Access

In a world of global market competition, the lower secondary level (Upper Basic School-UBS) has become part of basic education that is universally available while the upper secondary (Senior Secondary School-SSS) is prioritized given its key function in absorbing graduates from the basic level. Most of the SSS in contrast to the UBS are privately operated. The UBS are in their majority government owned and operated. While most SSS are located in urban prosperous regions (Regions 1 and 2), poor/rural regions are not left un-served and have witnessed the expansion of secondary schooling over the last years that act as an effective boost to access of children to secondary education.

The Girls' Scholarship Scheme is responsible for their improved enrolment at all educational levels. Girls' share of enrolment recorded significant improvement compared to boys'. At the lower basic level, it has been noticed that share of boys' enrolment is lower compared to

girls'. The key issue therefore is how to significantly improve access of children to secondary education, and at the same time remove all existing gender disparities at different levels of secondary education.

5.3.2 Equity

The problem of equity is more acute compared to lower basic education. Tuition fees and other costs (uniforms, text books, transportation, private tuition/classes etc) of secondary education including considerable opportunity costs serve as effective barriers to access for children from poorer households. Moreover, at this level of education, the social divide also gets prominently displayed. Hence the integration of the Madrassa institutions to allow graduates from these institutions to enjoy equal chances to job opportunities

5.3.3 Quality

Quality of education as reflected by performance of students at the West African Senior Secondary Education Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination (GABECE) leaves much to be desired. In 2004, nearly more than 90per cent of the candidates failed Mathematics, English and Sciences whilst on average more than half of the candidates failed all courses put together.

5.3.4 Relevance

Both in adequately preparing the students for higher education, and for meeting the manpower needs of the economy, secondary education in the Gambia could hardly play an effective role.

5.3.5 Efficiency

With significant drop out rates at the UBS and SSS, and failure rate at more than 80 percent at both the WASCE and GABECE examinations since the early 1990s, one can definitely raise questions about efficiency of our secondary education system.

5.4 Tertiary Education

5.4.1 Access

Access cannot be universal at this level, though the newly introduced University of the Gambia (1995) has been expanding substantially to meet the challenges of today's knowledge, economy and information in society. To date (2005), 1356 students have registered with the University of the Gambia. Girls seem to have much lower access to tertiary education. At the moment only undergraduate degree programmes are offered.

5.4.2 Equity

Equity is a major concern with only 266 female students registered currently at the UTG. Inequities at the previous levels are magnified by highly subsidized public education at tertiary level. Individual or private access to tertiary education is restricted only to those who can pay extremely high tuition fees. Only the children from affluent families can get enrolled if the government sponsorship is missing.

5.4.3 Quality

Quality is a serious problem in tertiary education even at the university. The UTG is yet to establish a quality standard unit, which would be mandated to ensure proper learning.

5.4.4 Relevance

In the absence of any linkage between the UTG and the job market, education imparted at the UTG is seen as having little or no relevance to the needs of the economy. Provision of university studies needs to be adjusted to the economic needs of the private sector thus responding to market signals, relevant to the economy in the short run, but also of long-term interests to the economy.

5.4.5 Efficiency

Shortage of lecturers and crowded classes are characteristic feature of the UTG and a clear indicator of inefficient management of tertiary education.

5.5 Vocational and Technical Education

The scope and access to vocational and technical education needs to be much wider. Most critical vocational preparation in today's globalized economy is a good mastery in science, mathematics, and language skills offered through sound general secondary education. Children who miss secondary education or drop out (a large number) need to have access to flexible and market responsive skill development opportunities. Public –private partnerships are especially important for this purpose. For out of school youth missing education, a second chance that combines general education and skill training needs to be explored.

5.6 Non-formal and Continuing Education

With a significant number of youth out of school, particularly women, and considerable dropouts in secondary education and an overall low literacy level of the people, there is a huge need for non-formal and continuing education. Supported by large external funding (UNDP and ADB), a vigorous movement has been launched by the government in this particular area of literacy and post literacy education in the form of Adult Literacy and Non Formal Education programs. Unfortunately, however, a total neglect of effective performance standards, quality criteria, combined with donor dependency characterized the

implementation phases. A proper literacy and continuing education program, the foundation of life-long learning, with enforceable quality criteria and performance standards is very much needed.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above discussions and on the basis of experience in other countries, which have registered rapid progress in education and national development as well as independent studies, research and analyses, we are recommending the following key measures to address the issues of access, equity, and quality at different levels of education, and also for enhancing the relevance of education, and efficiency of the delivery mechanism.

➢ To ally myths and misconceptions regarding girls' education, government and its partners in education need to intensify efforts to increase female participation in schooling at all levels through provisions of scholarship packages or subsidies especially towards poor or rural deprived households/communities.

➢ Public sensitization on the need to send children to school should be intensified to increase acceptance of western education, especially among rural communities. There is need to increase support to institutions involved in such initiatives to increase their impact in promoting girls' education, especially;

➢ Educational reforms should promote the efficiency, quality, relevance and effectiveness of the entire system of education and involve all the stakeholders in a bid to shape education for the benefit of the entire nation.

➢ *Partnerships:* Although it is government's responsibility for the provision of basic education for all, involvement and active participation of all stakeholders including parents, communities, private sector, businesses, NGOs, religious bodies will surely contribute to effective functioning of a nation-wide learning network, besides generating additional resources for the education sector. A comprehensive approach towards building partnerships, recognizing all potentials for contribution and participation, therefore needs to be properly articulated.

➢ *Teachers:* Teachers are at the core of quality improvement in education and hence for quality education/learning to prevail, teachers' leaving conditions should be upgraded (Incentives, Housing and Professional Development). They need to meet professional standards, have ample opportunities for continuous professional development, and must receive a respectable living wage. In turn, teachers must be accountable for their performance, which should be subjected to professional and public assessment, and which is eventually reflected in their pupil's achievement.

➢ *Linkages between Education and Society:* Finally, with a view to assisting students grow into adulthood as socially conscious, responsible citizens of the country, it is the team's view that all students participate as Volunteers in certain national development programs for a specific period of time during their student life.

- Promote lifelong education for all citizens of the country by non-formal means under appropriate institutional arrangements especially in supporting PTAs.

- Promote the participation of students in school administration to ensure protection of their rights as well sensitizing them on their civic role as future leaders.

- Strengthen the achievements in child protection and continue promoting the abolition of corporal punishment in schools as well as all forms of abuse and exploitation of children in the Gambia.

- In order to achieve the EFA targets and the MDGs, the Gambia should ensure that all newly born are registered at birth. Linking the birth registration database and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) would go a log way in not only establishing the whereabouts of all children in the Gambia, but would enable the Gambia target and provide the appropriate and most suitable learning opportunities.

Specifically Save the Children will be recommended to intervene in the following areas:

1. In the area of Special education where disadvantaged children are less likely to be enrolled in either mainstream or special school, Save the Children may need to pay special attention to these categories of children with particular focus to those living in rural and deprived, poverty stricken areas.

2. Mobilize resources aimed at strengthening Save the Children's cooperation with central and local governments, schools, communities and families/households to expand the provision of early childhood education, Madrassa, Non Formal, "Dara" and 'Informal education" to all children of the appropriate age of attend school.

3. Save the Children could support the initiatives parallel to the formal schooling system and which adopt strategies targeting disadvantaged children (children with disabilities and street children), youth and adults excluded from formal education opportunities.

4. To further address the issue of girls' education and retention of all children, Save the Children could mobilize resources (financial, material and human) which could be utilized to contribute towards achieving basic rights to food, shelter, security and health of all children without discrimination thus enabling children to fully participate in education without hindrances.

5. Save the Children should collaborate with the media and other stakeholders in sensitizing the public and masses in education, social and development issues and hence reaching out of school youth, children in "dara" and illiterate adults.

6. Save the Children should build and strengthen partnerships with NGOs, civil society organizations and development partners at community, national, regional and international levels.

7. Save the Children should advocate the inclusion of marginalized groups such as girls, women, disabled and orphans in the mainstream education system through participation in classrooms/schools constructions in strategic and target communities.

8. Save the Children may also consider, in ensuring equity and good governance of the resources allocated to schools and children, training PTA members in basic management and sensitizing communities in the pivotal/key functions that should be played by the PTAs in ensuring an effective and efficient utilization of resources at school levels.

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