

# Researching education outcomes in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda: using participatory tools and collaborative approaches

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## The Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools (ILOPS) Project | Project methodology

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# Acronyms

<b>ANCEFA</b>	African National Coalition on Education for All
<b>CERT</b>	Centre for Education, Research and Training, Malawi
<b>CONFEMEN</b>	Conference of Ministers of Education of the Francophonie (Conférence des Ministres de l'Éducation des pays ayant le français en partage)
<b>CRC</b>	Covenant on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSCQBE</b>	Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education, Malawi
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>COSYDEP</b>	Coalition of Teachers Unions and Education Organisations, Senegal
<b>EI</b>	Education International
<b>FENU</b>	Forum for Education Non Governmental Organisations in Uganda
<b>GCE</b>	Global Campaign for Education
<b>IDEC</b>	Institute of Economic Development, Burundi
<b>ILOPS</b>	Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools Project
<b>INEADE</b>	National Institute of Research and Action for the Development of Education, Senegal
<b>IoE</b>	Institute of Education, University of London
<b>KADEFO</b>	Kalangala District Education Forum, Uganda
<b>MADEN</b>	Masindi District Education Coalition, Uganda
<b>MAPSA</b>	Malawi Parent Association
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>PASEC</b>	Programme for Analysing Education Systems (Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs)
<b>SACMEQ</b>	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
<b>SAED</b>	Education for All Coalition, Burundi
<b>TANARD</b>	Target National Relief and Development, Mchinji District, Malawi
<b>UGAADEN</b>	Uganda Adult Education Network
<b>UNATU</b>	Uganda National Teachers Union

# Executive summary

**Over the past decade, over 40 million more children, many of them girls, have attended school worldwide (EFA GMR, 2010<sup>1</sup>). While this has been cause for celebration in many countries, there are persistent and increasing concerns that, in spite of this significant increase in school attendance rates, children are not actually gaining the knowledge nor developing the skills that will realistically improve their life chances. Though there are many strategies for improving student learning, two influential factors that appear frequently in academic literature are teaching/teacher quality and parental involvement in children's education (Edge et al., 2009a). However, the criteria defining how teachers and parents best contribute to meaningful child-centred learning remain a subject of active international debate.**

In January 2008, ActionAid, the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE) and partners in Burundi, Malawi, Uganda and Senegal studied the role of parents and teachers in enhancing learning outcomes. The Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools (ILOPS) Project was supported by the *Quality Education in Developing Countries Initiative* of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Findings from the ILOPS Project are presented in three separate briefs exploring teacher quality, parental participation and, this paper, exploring our tools and approaches. This paper outlines the participatory research methodology employed by the ILOPS Project team. We provide details on the development and implementation of our approach as well as the lessons learned throughout the process for others interested in following similar approaches. The other two briefs discuss the outcomes of the parental participation and teacher quality components of the survey.

The IoE led the development of the overall ILOPS collaborative methodology and engaged Project participants in jointly designing the various participatory tools. We hoped that by bringing parents, teachers, unions, coalitions, research institutes and Ministry officials together to do the research, a deeper understanding of the reasons why learning outcomes fail to improve would evolve. The goal was to create a

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<sup>1</sup> This and all other references in this paper are cited from the literature review by Edge et al. (2009a). The full review, which is published alongside the four comparative briefs, summarised 100 (out of a total of 573 identified) relevant articles on the factors that make parents decide to participate in their children's schools, and the influence of this participation on student learning outcomes.

lasting platform where these stakeholders could discuss their roles and commit to finding practical yet innovative strategies to improving learning.

The ILOPS team was committed to ensuring all stakeholders were equally and fully involved in each stage of the process. This included identifying research team members, designing the survey instruments, collecting the evidence base, analysing the results and proposing ideas for follow-on activities. This engagement necessitated deeper discussions of participants' own roles and contributions with respect to both the project itself and the notion of improving the quality of schooling for all students.

Committing to a methodology which promotes ongoing collaboration involves thoughtful design of workshops and spaces for regular discussion. Careful consideration of team dynamics, patience and open communication is important. Shared leadership, clear responsibilities and accountability are fundamental to building a good team. At first it was challenging to balance the unique expertise and knowledge of team members while trying to facilitate the collection of a robust evidence base. It required each participant to question their own biases around research, participation and the expectations of other stakeholders.

The methods used to support this type of joint work merit further exploration. We believe that they offer an innovative way of working, not only with respect to research, but also for improving the content and implementation of policies and programmes. The absence of genuine, long-term collaboration has partly contributed to today's poor performance in schools. Misconceptions about the roles of teachers and parents and the lack of empathy towards each other's constraints in supporting students create tension. Teachers, who themselves are frustrated by the lack of support and training, continue to be blamed for poor classroom performance. Parents, often lacking the know-how and access to schools are seen to be disinterested in their children's education. There are also misunderstandings between academics and researchers. As a result, researchers frequently study teachers' and parents' roles in an isolated manner. The results are then shared with peers and policy-makers, but not with the civil society organisations (CSOs), parents, communities and teachers who could effectively reflect on and implement the recommendations. The ILOPS approach aimed to challenge these traditions by bringing the different stakeholders together to jointly diagnose and solve the problem. By working closely together, we believe we can achieve an improvement in learning outcomes.

# Context

Current literature on improving learning often focuses on policy, structural and system-level changes as well as a range of other technical and physical inputs. Few studies focus on the role of stakeholders, in particular parents and teachers, in improving learning and yet these two groups are potentially the most influential in determining the relative success of education. Parents decide whether to invest in their children's education. Their actions at home and within schools are likely to influence whether or not their children successfully complete their basic schooling and pursue further studies. Teachers provide children with the skills and competencies needed to not only succeed in exams but, ideally, for students to live a well-rounded life.

Direct links between how the involvement of parents and capacity of teachers' influence on children's learning are not frequently made in the existing literature. It is therefore not surprising that policies and programmes rarely create lasting legacies of systematic improvements that should, in turn, positively influence student learning outcomes.

International assessments show that very few students achieve the 'minimum' level of proficiency and an even more dismal number, the 'desired' knowledge level. The 2002 Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) shows that in Malawi (Chimombo et al., 2005) only 0.1% of girls and 0.5% of boys reached the desired achievement levels. In Uganda the percentage of girls achieving the desired levels is 10.6% and 9.5% for boys (Byamugisha and Ssenabulya, 2005). The 2007 Programme for Analysing Education Systems (PASEC) in Senegal also shows that 40.6% of fifth graders tested achieved the desired levels (CONFEMEN 2007). Comparable international assessments are not available for Burundi nor are test results compiled at the national level. However, information available at the provincial level show that in 2007, the percentage of students in sixth grade in Bujumbura municipality achieving a 50% passing score in French was 29.1% and in Mathematics 10.3% (ActionAid Burundi, 2009).

Learning assessments and test results should not be the only way to measure success in school or education quality. Most countries do not have a clearly established definition of what 'quality' of education constitutes, although reference to international human rights standards is helpful. The ILOPS Project therefore adopts the definition provided by the Covenant on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which states, '*Every child has the right to receive an education of good quality which in turn requires a focus on the quality of the learning environment, of teaching and learning processes and materials, and of learning outputs*' (CRC, General Comment 1, para 22).

The 'learning outputs' go beyond exam scores and are defined by '*...the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering...to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence. "Education" in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually, and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society*' (CRC General Comment 1, para 2).

The international and national learning assessments, albeit lacking the qualitative measures of the learning process described in human rights covenants nevertheless show slow progress in student achievement. This low level of achievement is partly explained by the need for more relevant information on what precisely is required to improve learning. In many countries, evidence on programme effectiveness and policy outcomes is traditionally gathered within short timeframes by external researchers and consultants who deliver their findings directly to programme leaders and/or policy-makers. The focused nature of these traditional measurement and evaluation or impact assessment exercises offers few opportunities to genuinely engage different stakeholders in debating the



issues and discussing the implications of the findings. As a result, the analysis and findings remain isolated and are often not integrated into policy and practice debates. In turn, policy-makers and practitioners are not always able to access meaningful research and apply it in timely and innovative ways to improve policy or practice.

Traditionally, civil society organisations (CSOs) have rarely been involved in the process of commissioning, designing and analysing research undertaken by policy-makers or academics. Not surprisingly then, there have been few real opportunities for CSOs to fully influence the scope of research and, in turn, accept and/or challenge these results in order to improve their own work or influence policy, practice and future research. Teachers, parents and pupils are also rarely part of these processes and discussions. Their roles are often limited to providing data for studies and then adapting their own behaviour once the research has been transformed into new policy and programme innovations. Finally, research and evaluation addressing educational learning outcomes to date has seldom used orchestrated platforms uniting stakeholders to both discuss reasons for low achievement and harmonise their contributions to improve learning.

Traditional approaches to research have led to gaps in knowledge about students' and teachers' experiences in school and the extent of parental engagement in education. In addition, most of the current data comes from the developed world, namely the USA. There is little evidence from developing countries that shows how teachers and parents understand their roles and engage in improving learning. More needs to be known about the factors that motivate, support and provide incentives for their involvement as well as the outcomes of these efforts on children and the school environment. Improving the general knowledge base and ensuring evidence-based action ensues clearly requires strategies that bridge the gap between teachers, parents, researchers, policy-makers,

advocacy organisation leaders and practitioners. This is what the Improving Learning Outcomes in Primary Schools Project (ILOPS) set out to achieve.

In 2008, ActionAid received a grant from the *Quality Education in Developing Countries Initiative* of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The overall goal of the ILOPS Project was to research the current context of education in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda. To achieve this goal, the international ILOPS staff worked with national-level representatives to recruit teams of key stakeholders who would engage in a collaborative research effort to explore the context and influence of parental participation and teacher quality on student learning outcomes.

The ILOPS teams collected evidence that accurately portrayed the current state of play in education provision. The collaborative process of creating a robust evidence base has helped stakeholders to understand challenges in holistic or integrated ways:

*While some of this information is available, this is one of the first times we have seen it gathered in an organised manner from which we can make connections and identify levers for change. This project will change the way we plan our work in promoting education. It has provided an in-depth understanding of the status of education in Malawi. There are so many gaps ranging from policy, implementation and practice.*

(Mid-term review, 2008)

ILOPS also aimed to capture the voices and experiences of those on the educational frontline – the teachers, parents and students – who are rarely included in traditional academic or policy research frameworks. These stakeholders are not commonly found sitting across the table from Ministry officials, teacher unions and CSOs. And yet, the perspectives of parents related to what needs to improve and how best

to do it may be distinctly different from the views of the policy-makers and activists. These varying perspectives have not often been accepted, nor has the space to discuss them been encouraged or planned for. This situation occurs despite international human rights law recognising the importance of tracking progress and holding states accountable for improving education. For example, the Covenant on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that:

*The Committee calls upon States parties to devote more attention to education as a dynamic process and to devising means by which to measure changes over time in relation to article 29(1)... The Committee notes the importance of surveys that may provide an opportunity to assess the progress made, based upon consideration of the views of all actors involved in the process, including children currently in or out of school, teachers and youth leaders, parents, and educational administrators and supervisors. In this respect, the Committee emphasizes the role of national-level monitoring which seeks to ensure that children, parents and teachers can have an input in decisions relevant to education.*

For the ILOPS Project, bringing different groups together to collect and review evidence, debate perspectives and find common solutions was key to ensuring that new policy and implementation decisions would be based on accurate and relevant data. In order for this to happen, we created space and incentives for each actor to challenge their own assumptions about the other stakeholder groups and specific education issues. This collaborative process helped to build collective ownership of the research outcomes and has since led to the development of implementable and sustainable future initiatives.

This **Participatory Research Methods Brief** is the first in a series of three ILOPS comparative research papers. It focuses on the research process that was designed and implemented within and across the four ILOPS countries. The remaining two papers concentrate on the evidence-base generated from ILOPS on parental participation (Marphatia et al., 2010a) and teacher quality (Marphatia et al., 2010b). Each of the research briefs builds on the international literature review (Edge et al. 2009a) and brings together the evidence from national and district-level ILOPS research studies and the final project evaluation (Edge et al., 2009b).



Patrick Wiggins/Panos Pictures/ActionAid

# Current knowledge

## Current knowledge on participatory approaches involving stakeholders to address children's learning

A light-touch review that simultaneously scanned the academic and practice literature was commissioned to support both the ILOPS participatory methodology and the design of research tools (Edge et al., 2009a). The review provided summaries of current thinking and research related to teacher quality and parental participation and how these influenced achievement. The outcomes provided three key strands of thought that informed and reinforced the ILOPS process:

**Lack of research from developing countries.** The review revealed, not surprisingly, that an overwhelming number of articles and resources were from developed countries. Most of the parental participation research was from Northern settings, and often focused on low-income urban areas in the USA. Even when data from developing countries was available (as it was on teacher quality), the lead author/researcher was almost always resident and affiliated with a Northern university, organisation or institute. These findings highlight the distinct lack of studies undertaken by local researchers to explore context related issues in developing countries. In particular, the review authors reinforced *'the need for specific context and culturally specific, on the ground research to explore the situation in country and in district'* (Edge et al., 2009a: 7).

### Examples of participatory research processes.

Here again, the international research shows that, although progress is being made, the inclusion of stakeholders in research and reform has been infrequent and preliminary at best (Osei, 2008; Ilon, 2004; Konings, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2002). However, a few initiatives do demonstrate how bottom-up participatory and inclusive research processes have succeeded in bringing stakeholders to the table and generating positive momentum for policy and practice change in education (Dembele and Schwillie, 2003; Heneveld, 2007). These experiences underline the

importance of taking into account stakeholders' perceptions, their confidence and the extent of their active involvement in all phases of reform in order to bring forth successful educational change (Kalin, 2007).

### The need for links between teacher quality and parental participation and student outcomes.

There are significant methodological challenges in directly linking educational processes to student learning outcomes. The authors of the literature review concluded, *'Much of the research on parental participation and teacher quality does not directly explore the impact of either on student outcomes. In turn, there is little research that attempts to directly correlate the influence of teachers on parents and vice versa'* (Edge et al., 2009a: 4).

### Implications of literature review on the ILOPS collaborative research approach

The literature review encouraged a tighter and more realistic focus to the ILOPS research. Research teams applied the principles of participatory research and the need for robust evidence from a local context to facilitate the analysis of how teachers and parents influence achievement. They jointly developed a conceptual framework to define the ILOPS participatory approach. This involved clearly defining the roles of key stakeholders at each step of the research process to create a mutually accountable team. In each country, a local research institute was also recruited as part of the team to ensure the research instruments were solid and teams were properly trained in collecting data. Researchers agreed to focus on understanding the engagement of parents and teachers in schools, parental involvement in school governance, and how these two factors influenced achievement. Based on these findings, some of the initiatives being implemented in follow-on activities have been designed to determine the actual impact of the involvement of parents and support of teachers on children's learning outcomes.

## SECTION 2

# Building ILOPS partnerships

### **Recruiting the international, national and local researchers**

The first step in the ILOPS collaborative research effort was to recruit a coordinating team with project management skills, knowledge of research methods and experience with participatory approaches. The team comprised an international coordinator, a project assistant, a lead research partner from the IoE and four national-level ILOPS project coordinators.

An *international steering committee* was also established, which included representatives from Education International's (EI) Africa Regional Bureau, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (for guidance on participatory approaches), the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA). These experts guided the ILOPS overall strategy on engaging participants and developing a robust evidence-based foundation for future innovation.

Three distinct but inter-connected country-level structures were also created:

**National steering committees.** The ILOPS national project coordinators were responsible for recruiting individuals to serve on the steering committees. The role of these committees included overseeing research design and implementation, providing technical feedback, and supporting and ensuring accountability and transparency in both the research process and outcomes. Members included a representative from the Ministry of Education and leaders from each ILOPS national research team member organisation.

**Local steering committees.** Within each country, local steering committees were also established to facilitate local research within the two focus districts of each country. The members included district-level Ministry staff; district education coalitions; adult education organisations; community leaders and parents.

**Multi-stakeholder research teams.** The national and local steering committees then selected members for the national and local research teams who were responsible for leading the research at the national and local level. Their responsibilities included designing and conducting research then analysing the findings, sharing results for debate by different stakeholders, and developing a three-year project plan. Although team member selection was defined and conducted separately within each country, a standard set of suggested membership requirements maintained a similar composition across national teams. This included one person from each of the following constituencies:

- national research institute or university
- national and district education coalition
- parents' representatives/adult learners
- children/student representatives
- the Ministry of Education/government partners
- teachers' union representatives.

The national project coordinators facilitated links between the International ILOPS Steering Committee and the national and local committees and teams, as well as their respective stakeholder groups. These constituency groups held the ILOPS National Research Team and National Steering Committee accountable for engaging with relevant stakeholders on a consistent and ongoing basis.

## The constituencies involved in multi-stakeholder research teams

This section describes each of the stakeholder groups and discusses their respective roles within the overall partnership (see end of paper for the names of individuals involved). The end of project evaluation highlights feedback from the different partners on their participation in the ILOPS Project.

Each stakeholder group in the research teams played a key role in defining research objectives and methods. The goal was to ensure that their individual and collective interests and needs were addressed. Each member also played an important role in sensitising their own constituencies to the goals and process of the ILOPS research. They were also critical in facilitating discussions around the findings, and potential future actions, both across the team and within their own constituencies. This exchange of perspectives proved to be exceptionally valuable in building strong teams, as explained by one participant during the end of project evaluation:

*I have greater insight into the teacher issues because we directly work with the teacher's union. We have brought on board expertise within the area of the teacher profession. I also have wider insight into area of other literacy and participatory techniques which were brought on board by the reflective practitioners and the functional adult literacy practitioners. So, all these (stakeholders) brought in various technical expertise, which was very useful, compared to a special single consultant who would (traditionally) be engaged to undertake the study.*

(Edge et al., 2009b: 16)

**Expert research partners/institutes.** The international and national research partners were respected academics with extensive experience in educational research and policy issues in each of the countries. They provided overall guidance for the survey, ensured the approach to collecting data was rigorous and supported all partners in developing the capacity and confidence to actively participate in the process.

As the lead research advisor, the IoE provided overall guidance on research methods, assisted in designing the cross-country participatory research workshops and the development of survey tools and also provided specific guidance during the data collection and analysis stages. They also conducted the international

literature review. IOE team members, who had not been involved in the project at the beginning, conducted the end of project evaluation.

National research partners included the Institute of Economic Development (IDEC) in Burundi; the Centre for Education, Research and Training (CERT) in Malawi; the Uganda Adult Education Network (UGAADEN); and the National Institute of Research and Action for the Development of Education (INEADE) in Senegal. Box 1 explores the influence of the collaborative approach on these research partners.

### Box 1

#### ILOPS impact on researchers

(Edge et al., 2009b: 13)

**Creative tensions emerged between the more traditional academic institute representatives and the members of the education coalitions and community groups. Academics/researchers were viewed as being too theoretical and the community/coalition advocates were viewed as lacking the rigour required for research. Together, however, each group proffered their respective skills, built on each other's added value, developed their capacity to see the others' perspectives and came to understand the benefits of collaboration. For example, at first researchers challenged the usefulness of involving non-research oriented members in the team, but later in the ILOPS evaluation revealed that the experience was rewarding: 'I must admit at the beginning, I was slightly sceptical; but I saw that in a short time, someone with no research skills can become a junior researcher.'**

**Education coalition partners.** Within each country, national and district education coalitions represented different stakeholder groups and fulfilled important advocacy and liaison roles between national and community-based organisations. During the ILOPS Project, they analysed the national policy documents together with the teachers' unions, and organised national and district forums to discuss ILOPS findings. The coalition partners involved in ILOPS included:

- The Education for All Coalition Burundi (SAED) which includes only one of the four teachers' unions and does not include representation from research institutes;
- The Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic

## Box 2

### **ILOPS impact on coalitions**

(Edge et al., 2009b: 16)

Coalition partners appreciated the value of a solid research evidence base – rather than depending on rhetoric and popular campaigning – to advocate for policy change. They now feel more confident in their ability to build an evidence base and to challenge the evidence brought forward by others where it lacks credibility. They also felt the project had helped to broaden their membership base. As one participant explains, *‘The project allowed us to strengthen the networks, the partners we had, by involving them not sporadically, but systematically. And with the relevant follow-up, we are now able to collectively address some of the problems we face in the education sector.’*

Education, Malawi (CSCQBE) which includes the district education networks, other education groups and teachers’ unions but not research institutes;

- Target National Relief and Development (TANARD) in Mchinji District, Malawi;
- The Centre for Human Rights and Institute for National Social Initiatives, Machinga, Malawi;
- Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda (FENU) which includes Makerere University, local and national NGOs and the Ugandan National Teacher’s Union (UNATU);
- Masindi District Education Coalition (MADEN), Uganda;
- Kalangala District Education Forum (KADEFU), Uganda;
- Coalition of Teachers Unions and Education Organisations, Senegal (COSYDEP) which includes some of the 30 teachers’ unions in advocacy efforts.

Box 2 shows that their participation in the ILOPS project has influenced some coalitions to widen their membership base.

**Parents/adult learners.** Parental advocacy organisations were also members of the national and local-level steering committees and research teams. The ILOPS approach is based on the premise that everyone, even those who are not literate, has something valuable to contribute in developing a shared understanding of the current issues facing families, educators and policy-makers.

## Box 3

### **Impact on partners working with parents**

(Edge et al., 2009b: 13)

Based on the ILOPS evaluation and comments from parent representatives it was clear that parental participation challenged inherent assumptions about the value of parental perspectives. However, work needed to be done with other partners to broaden team member perspectives on consulting with non-literate parents and engaging them in the process to solve educational problems alongside other constituents. As one participant explained during the end of project evaluation, *‘We realised it was possible to include lay communities in an action research process where they used their own values and their own knowledge and experience.’*

Malawi’s Parent Association (MAPSA), Uganda’s Pamoja Reflect Network, the Association of Mothers’ Groups in Senegal and the Reflect Network in Burundi were all actively involved in the research process. During data collection, these groups worked closely with communities to involve parents as members of the local-level data collection teams. Box 3 illustrates the challenges and rewards of this engagement.

**Students/children.** In Malawi and Burundi, students were also included in research teams at the local level. They were interviewed on their views about current parental involvement in school and in their learning at home; what they liked and disliked at school and at home; how teaching and learning strategies, and teachers in particular, could improve; and how they believed they could improve their own involvement in schools and with parents. The clear manner in which they articulated the challenges and their insights on areas for improvement empowered research team members to involve them in future initiatives such as creating discussion forums which reached decision-makers. As the final project evaluation included the research team members only, there is no box on students’ experiences. However, quotes from students can be found within the country research reports.

**Government partners.** Within all four countries, frank dialogue between ILOPS international and national coordinators and education officials at the

## Box 4

### Impact on government

(Edge et al., 2009b: 15)

Government representatives participating in ILOPS shared how this collaboration helped them to understand civil society positions on education. One representative stated: *'The other issue is how to work collaboratively, more especially when you look at the relationship between the civil society organizations and the government for example the civil society people are trying maybe to lobby for more resources, sometimes want things that maybe they are against whatever government is trying to do, so in a way it has helped me to appreciate why civil society organizations behave in the way they do, when they lobby for more resources.'*

onset of the project showed that each government would require specific parameters to ensure their participation while allowing us to maintain autonomy of the research team.

Government representatives were part of the national and district steering committees in Malawi and Senegal. In Malawi, the Director of Basic Education and district primary education advisors were involved in the research team, playing a leading role in national-level analysis and planning. Research teams in Uganda and Burundi held regular update meetings with the Minister for Education, who nominated a focal person to facilitate access to data and clear potential roadblocks. Government officials participated in the analysis workshops after data collection at the national, district and local levels in all four countries was completed. In Box 4, we highlight how government officials perceived the value of the process.

**Teachers' unions and teachers.** Education International (EI) and the International Federation of Teachers' Unions joined the International ILOPS Steering Committee through their Africa Regional Office. As part of their role, they led the partnership with national teachers' unions. This was particularly important in Senegal, where no less than 30 teachers' unions exist, and in Burundi, where there are four unions with little experience in collaboration. EI also provided feedback on the teachers' portion of the

## Box 5

### Impact on teachers' unions

(Edge et al., 2009b: 14)

A teachers' union representative shared how the ILOPS Project has promoted greater understanding between the government and Unions, 'The project allowed trade unions and the government to work together, in another framework than trade unions' demands. This was positive.'

survey by attending the Start Up Workshop and national analysis workshops.

Each ILOPS in-country research team included teachers' union representatives from UNATU in Uganda; COSYDEP in Senegal; the Teachers Union of Malawi; and the STEB Teachers Union of Burundi. Teachers were also recruited to be part of the local-level research teams. They were selected either by union recommendation, or at the school level in consultation with the headteacher or local education groups. Their involvement created an important opportunity to reflect upon how they contributed effectively to children's learning, possible areas of improvement in teaching style and what was required in terms of support and training. Overall, the involvement of these national unions created a powerful example of a new dynamic in working relations between teachers, civil society and the government. The relationships were based on recognition of common goals, mutual respect and openness to change (Box 5).

### Strategies for coordinating national-level team involvement

As each country designed and developed their research strategy, different patterns of leading and collaborating began to emerge within national-level ILOPS committees and teams. In some countries, work patterns followed a more historical legacy of collaboration. In others it appeared to be linked to the opportunities the research provided to bring new partners and stakeholders to the national-level table. Table 1 (page 16) highlights the different partnership approaches taken within each country as they worked to organise and lead the research. Building these partnerships created a number of challenges based on the specific context of each country. The national research teams and steering committees discussed how to best address these potential obstacles.

Table 1  
**ILOPS partnership approaches**

<b>Partnership models</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>BURUNDI:</b> single organisational leadership uniting key actors.	A solid network of education organisations did not yet exist, especially in respect to the four teachers' unions.	The team labelled their approach a ' <i>step-by-step</i> ' method as national mapping was done by two respected researchers who shared their findings with 60+ actors. This facilitated exchange/debate and built the confidence of other actors, some of whom joined the team for district-, school- and community-level research.	Undertaking a research project which did not provide funds for school building ignited debates between partners due to the needs of post-conflict Burundi. The debate on the relative roles of the state and NGOs continues because of the large deficit in school numbers, and lack of both resources and, at times, capacity.
<b>MALAWI:</b> creating new partnerships between diverse educational organisations.	The variety and diversity of research tasks required a new set of partners who worked together for the first time.	The team identified their approach as ' <i>peer accountability</i> ' because of the openness and acceptance of findings and critical analysis of what needs to change. The inclusion of the Ministry of Education in the research team was very important.	Bringing new partners together required paying more attention to team dynamics, including frequent meetings and debates over roles. At first partners were frustrated at the time this took but later recognised that it strengthened their working relations.
<b>SENEGAL:</b> empowering non-research oriented actors.	The engagement of diverse actors required joint leadership from a respected researcher familiar to stakeholders.	The team labelled their approach as ' <i>capacity building</i> ' because of the inclusion of non-research oriented civil society participants, parents and pupils. Their participation enhanced the quality of research because they portrayed local context.	Engaging untrained researchers was rewarding but required sustained capacity building and time. As team members built their capacity to conduct research, they were able to provide support to those who required further guidance.
<b>UGANDA:</b> dividing tasks according to experience of education organisations.	Strong, existing network of education groups with a history of working together according to their area of expertise but not necessarily on research.	The team felt the term ' <i>experiential approach</i> ' best captured their methodology as they organised the survey according to the team's expertise. They started the survey in schools and communities which provided a different lens through which to analyse and identify gaps between practice and policy.	The lack of clear criteria for selecting schools yielded a large volume of data that overwhelmed the research team. They developed a process for streamlining the collation of data which also facilitated the analysis. Partners have since refined their data collection approaches in the follow-on project.
<b>Global:</b> Guidance from experts in research, teachers and parents.	Combined expertise and leadership from the research institute ensured survey design was comparative, rigorous and accessible.	The support provided by international experts can be seen as an ' <i>advisory approach</i> .' EI encouraged unions to go beyond discussions on salary to debates on quality of education and teacher's roles.	The project timeline made it difficult to fully benefit from GCE and ANCEFA's mobilisation capacity and engaging other countries in regional advocacy.

Source: ActionAid Burundi (2009); ActionAid Malawi (2009); ActionAid Senegal (2009); and ActionAid Uganda (2009)

# Designing the ILOPS research framework

**This section highlights the process of designing, gathering and analysing data across the ILOPS countries. Our methodology is presented in the form of ‘tools’ used within the process which can be adapted to different contexts.**

## Box 6

### Project timeline

January 2008 – June 2009

#### Phase 1: Partnerships (January – March)

- Build partnerships and discuss areas of research

#### Phase 2: Research (April – October)

- Design survey at cross-country workshop
- Conduct survey at national/district levels and local levels
- Undertake international literature review
- Analyse findings

#### Phase 3: Findings (November – June 2009)

- Validate findings through discussion forums
- Share survey results at cross-country workshop
- Prepare three-year project plan
- Evaluate collaborative approach

In the past, across the four ILOPS countries, research was usually undertaken by a consultant who reviewed documents and gathered different stakeholder perspectives within a short timeframe. Sometimes the results were shared with communities and others who participated in the research but often this was a feedback exercise rather than a genuine engagement in influencing the findings or analysis. The ILOPS project sought to change this researcher vs. stakeholder dynamic by explicitly engaging different actors in the design and implementation of research. As one ILOPS in-country researcher explained during the final evaluation:

*Because in my line of work, whenever we had to do research, we would engage a consultant and the consultant would do the work and then just come back and give us results, but this time the project coordinator and the partners and myself, we were actually engaged in the research right from the beginning: the designing, going to do the actual data collection and analysis. So we went through the whole process and I found it very enriching for me because I have learned quite a lot now on the research processes.*

(Edge et al., 2009b: 13)

The ILOPS collaborative approach sought to build multi-stakeholder teams which were involved at every step of the process, from the definition of research questions to the formation of research teams who jointly developed the conceptual framework, the survey methodology, tools and instruments (see Box 6 for project timeline).

### Pre-workshop activities and agenda setting

Once the national-level teams were recruited, members participated in virtual discussions within and between countries on the key topics to be covered by the survey. An outline of key issues was compiled and agreed on by the national steering committees, then shared with the four countries. This led to a synthesis of core issues that were

framed as the following series of questions:

- How are national and local policies supporting teachers, promoting parental participation in school and improving learning outcomes?
- How do stakeholders understand national policy and their ascribed roles? Does policy reflect practice?
- What is the current teacher profile (trained, contract, untrained) and the different types of training programmes currently available?
- What roles and expectations do governments, teachers, parents, communities and pupils have for themselves and of each other?
- Do parents participate in schools and in their children's learning? How?
- What do these actors expect children should be learning in school and what are they really learning?
- What needs to change and how in order to improve the quality of education?

A draft survey document was developed based on feedback from each of the country teams during the pre-workshop activities. Based on this process, the International Project Coordinator and Lead Research Partner developed the framework for the survey questions which was reviewed and refined during the workshop and with a larger group of partners at the national level. While we used the term 'survey' to describe the instrument, it could also be described as an audit or mapping tool.

Negotiating and defining core questions took a great deal of time, effort and patience. However, as one participant explained in the end of project evaluation, it was a valuable process for building ownership:

*I guess I learnt quite a lot about how to bring together different partner organizations around a common pieces of research This is very different from a lot of research projects in that the emphasis was as much as anything on getting different partners actively engaged with the questions and getting them to both decide and play a significant role in the design, particularly in the collecting and analysis of the data. So how to go about doing that, particularly where you are going about collecting stuff that are both at the national level, the district, and at the school level? Trying to hold that together is quite a challenge.*

(Edge et al., 2009b: 12)

# Workshop 1

## The Sesse cross-country research design workshop

In April 2008, partners from each core national-level research team met for a week-long research design workshop in the Sesse Islands, Kalangala District, in Uganda. The intended outcome of the workshop was to generate a common understanding of the overall project goal, along with its objectives and activities.

**Attendees.** In total, 54 people attended the workshop. Five partners representing each country-level research team participated in the Sesse Workshop, including two ActionAid country office representatives; a Teachers' Union official; an education coalition representative; and the lead researcher.

**Theory of action.** The Lead Research Partner and International Project Coordinator developed the workshop activities in consultation with national team members. We believed that early and intense collaboration, from the onset, would build ownership, engagement and trust between partners. This was important because many of the partners had not worked together before. We were also mindful that only a small few of the participants were formal researchers. This was the first step in our journey to nurturing teams of researchers within and across countries. As partnerships are bound to be influenced by the different pressures and priorities of each of its members, this dedicated team-building and design time was important for resolving the conflicts that inevitably arose.

**Design process.** From the onset of the ILOPS Project and throughout the research process, one of the biggest challenges was balancing the need to collect ample and accurate basic data that represented the larger context, with the need for detailed information on the three specific themes. To achieve this, we developed a number of different interactive strategies that facilitated interaction within and between countries and expert groups (i.e. all teachers' union representatives). These deliberate measures were important in building the international component to the work.

**Daily rituals.** Table 2 provides a glimpse of our daily collaborative process.

Table 2

**Four daily rituals**

<b>Goal</b>	To create opportunities for developing an understanding of the four countries and build on the lessons of the day to enhance the process of the next.	
<b>Ritual</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>1</b> Country briefings	Country team to profile education system and key challenges for improving learning. Required to use a unique and interactive presentation format	Common themes, practices and policies across four countries. Range of challenges highlighted need to focus survey
<b>2</b> Collective review of survey	Days 2–4 each focused on one of three themes: teachers, parents and learning outcomes. The survey pertaining to the focus area was reviewed	Deeper appreciation of designing good research tools to facilitate deeper understanding
<b>3</b> Testing survey instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role plays, interviewing techniques</li> <li>• Daily field test within a school/community</li> <li>• 'Q&amp;A' with teachers (untrained and professional), district education officials</li> </ul>	Parents, pupils, SMC/PTA, community leaders, teachers, and headteachers interviewed and critiqued on tone, clarity of survey
<b>4</b> Exploring participatory approaches	Hands-on session of different participatory approaches used by team members including the <i>Reflect</i> methodology (Box 7)	Sharing expertise and agreement of ILOPS methodology
<b>Outcomes</b>	<i>Testing instruments with respondents enabled the teams to build essential research skills such as assessing quality of questions, delivery, tone and participatory technique. It also had the added advantage of pitching the research against genuine case studies, grounding it in reality right from the outset.</i>	

Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London, and A. Marphatia, ActionAid



ActionAid Burundi

**Box 7****Using the *Reflect* approach to involve parents in the mapping**

The engagement of parents as researchers and respondents was helped by community-based organisations and *Reflect* facilitators who were in turn supported by the National Research Institute. The *Reflect* approach is an innovative methodology inspired by the political philosophy of Paulo Freire. It combines adult literacy, participatory learning and action techniques with community empowerment approaches. In the ILOPS Project, *Reflect* methodology was used to raise parents' awareness of problems in education, as well as of the roles and responsibilities of all involved.

For more information on the *Reflect* methodology, visit [www.reflect-action.org](http://www.reflect-action.org)

## Mapping expertise: what makes a good research team?

We designed a series of tools to identify the key areas of expertise considered important for undertaking a national research programme (Tool 1), and subsequently mapped the individual and collective strengths of these teams (Tools 2a and 2b). The resulting skills matrix required each individual to map their organisational affiliation with their main area of expertise (indicated by 'X') as well as two other areas of competence. This helped to identify both gaps in capacity that could be filled by the recruitment of additional team members, and those participants who could potentially lead the different project/survey activities.



### Tool 1

#### Identifying must-have knowledge, skills and attitudes of national team members

<b>Goal</b>	To facilitate development of in-country teams.	
<b>Steps</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1</b>	Whole group	Generate master list of categories of expertise
<b>2</b>	In-country teams	Rank top five skills from full list, without any attention to relative importance
<b>3</b>	Whole group	Highlight choices on the collective list to generate 'master list'
<b>Outcome</b>	<i>Seven categories of expertise/knowledge emerged: Quantitative analysis, Qualitative/Communication, Participatory methods, Gender/culture sensitivity, Research design, Documentation and reporting.</i>	

*Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London*

### Tool 2a

#### Mapping our collective in-country strengths

<b>Goal</b>	To facilitate development of in-country teams.	
<b>Steps</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1</b>	Whole group	Generate master list of categories of expertise
<b>2</b>	In-country teams	Rank top five skills from full list, without any attention to relative importance
<b>3</b>	Whole group	Highlight choices on the collective list to generate 'master list'
<b>Outcome</b>	<i>Seven categories of expertise/knowledge emerged: Quantitative analysis, Qualitative/Communication, Participatory methods, Gender/culture sensitivity, Research design, Documentation and reporting.</i>	

*Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London*

Tool 2b

**Skills matrix**

Stakeholder	Criteria					
	Quantitative analysis	Qualitative/ Communication	Participatory methods	Gender/ culture sensitivity	Research design	Documentation and reporting
ActionAid		X + Gender and participatory methods				
Research Institute	X + research design, documentation					
Teachers' Union					X + quantitative, participatory methods	
Education Coalition			X + qualitative, gender			
Parent Teacher Association			X + design, qualitative			
Parents			X + gender, qualitative			
Teachers	X + gender, documenting					
Pupils			X + gender, documenting			

*Matrix developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London*

## Developing the ILOPS conceptual framework

Defining and refining the conceptual model was a process that began during the final session of Day 1 and continued until the conclusion of the Sesse Workshop.

### Tool 3a

#### Developing the ILOPS conceptual model

<b>Goal</b>	Examine relative strengths and weakness of four models based on learner-outcomes-focused schools and communities in order to develop ILOPS conceptual model.		
<b>Steps</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Description</b>	
<b>1</b>	Mixed country groups	Generate comparative analysis of each model	
<b>2</b>	Mixed country groups	Identify most influential elements from the models	
<b>3</b>	Mixed country groups	Design ILOPS model based on key elements from models studied then share	
<b>4</b>	Whole group	Discuss different models and agree on collective ILOPS model	
<b>Outcome</b>	<i>Identify key elements from each model (Tool 3b) and collectively agree on an ILOPS model (Diagram 1).</i>		

*Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London*

### Tool 3b

#### Key elements for designing the ILOPS conceptual model

<b>Goal</b>	Work in your country group to review existing conceptual models exploring conditions and factors that influence student outcomes in order to design an ILOPS-specific approach.			
<b>Element</b>	<b>Model being referenced</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Implication for ILOPS survey design</b>	
<b>1</b> Pupils at the centre of educational activities	Epstein's (2001) spheres of influence	Seeks to understand the overlapping influence of individuals, institutional beliefs and practice	Survey focus on how people, policies or interventions influence student learning	
<b>2</b> Contributions of different stakeholder groups	Newmann et al. (1999) student-centred school improvement model	Adds factors influencing learning from policy and political environment to parental, school and community interaction	Determine quality of learning. Survey to include analysis of national policies and local programmes	
<b>3</b> School environment	Edge (2009)	Studies the complexities and politics in the school environment	Identify challenges and opportunities in classrooms by teachers and pupils	
<b>4</b> Political and policy sphere	Unterhalter (2008) Conceptual Gender Framework	Study socially, culturally constructed beliefs at educational, spatial, political, health and economic levels	Survey to include social and gender forces that influence stakeholders' participation and perceptions	
<b>Outcome</b>	<i>ILOPS conceptual model (Diagram 1) which focuses on roles, practice, perceptions, expectations and influences (potential).</i>			

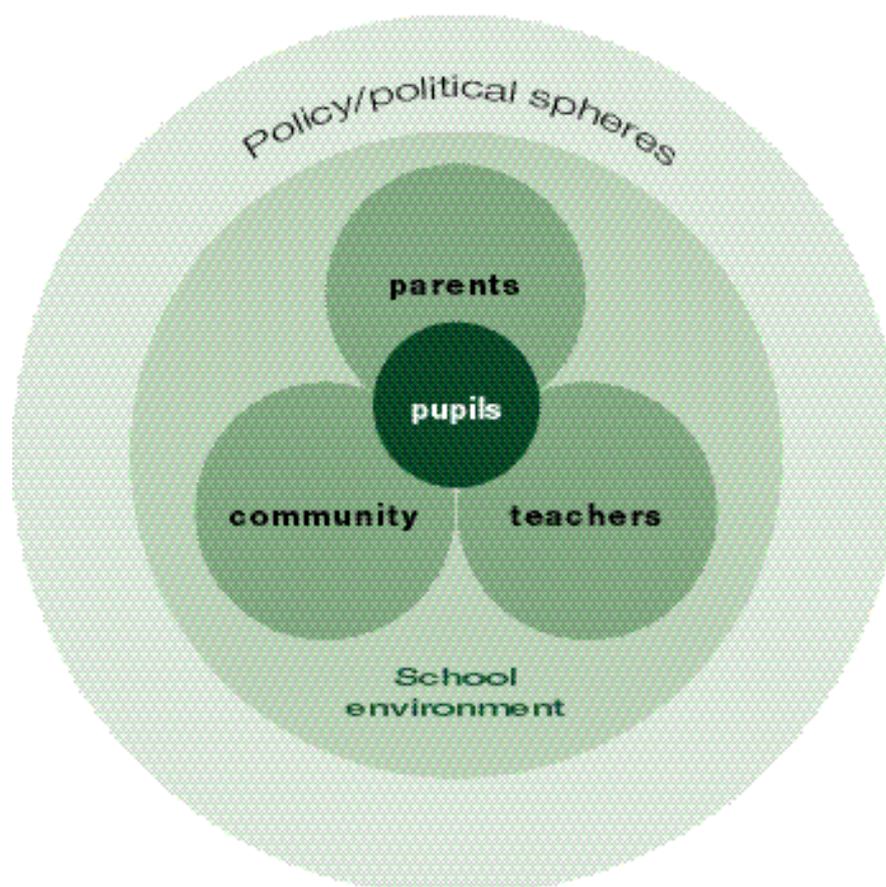
*Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London.*

## Focusing the ILOPS research

During these initial discussions and the development of the conceptual model we came to the collective realisation that the conditions required to establish correlations between each of these factors could not be created within this short timeframe. We also needed to first understand how policy and practice related to both issues were evolving at the national and local levels. This decision was also influenced by the literature review, which found little evidence on the current state of parental and teacher involvement in improving learning from developing countries.

The ILOPS Project was intended to focus on understanding the landscape surrounding the different research components in each country rather than attempting to conduct research that would require correlating student outcomes to specific teacher quality and parental participation strategies. However, based on the collective understanding generated during the first year, the follow-on work would focus on examining the interconnections between all factors, and implementing strategies that would have a direct impact on improving learning outcomes.

Diagram 1  
**ILOPS Conceptual Model**



## Generating and testing interview instruments

**Designing research tools.** Day 2 was dedicated to designing and testing tools in support of the research exploring teacher quality. As this was the first of our three areas of research, the format for the day was replicated, with some minor changes, on Days 3 and 4, supporting our collaborative efforts

to design the tools for parental participation and student outcomes. Although each day was facilitated by a different group of partners, they all basically followed the same four daily routines described above. The collaborative process for generating the interview instruments used the following five steps on each day (Tool 4).

### Tool 4

#### Five steps to generating interview instruments

<b>Goal</b>			
Design interview instruments reflecting the perspectives, interests and core needs of each participant, each country context and each stakeholder group.			
<b>Step</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Output</b>
<b>1</b> Create a master list of possible questions	In-country teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 minutes to generate all all questions related to teachers</li> <li>• Note one question per paper</li> <li>• Facilitators gather questions</li> <li>• Repeat for questions related to parents, then student outcomes</li> </ul>	50–80 questions generated for each topic
<b>2</b> Prioritise questions	Cross-country topic groups (i.e. coalition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants review questions generated in step 1</li> <li>• Group questions into subthemes</li> <li>• Prioritise by perceived relevancy, clarity and survey objectives</li> <li>• Generate (reword) final questions</li> </ul>	10 questions per sub-theme (generally four per topic)
<b>3</b> Strengthen basic interviewing and data gathering skills	Five stakeholder groups: teachers, students, parents, head teachers, and SMC/PTA members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Stakeholder’ groups interview and/or participate in role plays</li> <li>• Advise on creating open dialogue, avoiding leading, judgemental questions</li> <li>• Share participatory methodologies</li> </ul>	Revise interview and focus group tools
<b>4</b> Testing instruments in the field	Cross-country teams organised by stakeholder group to be interviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview, focus groups with Ministry, headteachers, teachers, students, parents, PTA and SMC</li> <li>• Advise on style, tone and content of the questions</li> </ul>	Build interview skills, noting revisions and learning from respondents
<b>5</b> Revising tools	Cross-country topic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise tools and interview techniques based on feedback</li> <li>• Agree on methodologies</li> </ul>	Revise tools and methodologies
<b>Outcome</b>	<p><i>Questions for teachers, parents and learning outcomes generated using three areas of inquiry. For teachers on: (a) their role and the activities they undertook to improve learning; (b) the role of headteachers, parents, students, communities, government and unions in supporting both teachers and learning outcomes; and (c) challenges and recommendations for supporting teachers and learning outcomes.</i></p>		

Developed by K. Edge, Institute of Education, University of London

## Next steps

The final day of the Sesse Workshop was dedicated to finalising the conceptual model; agreeing on the process for conducting the survey; addressing challenges; and deciding on an effective way to share findings at key points in the process. The day concluded with establishing a clear process for further adapting, testing and finalising the instruments (including translating it into local languages). A larger group of partners would be engaged in finalising the research tools throughout the months of April and May.

In addition to testing the instruments, in-country teams agreed to a shared process of training the researchers who would conduct the survey. Once the national teams had revised their instruments, data collection process and enumerator training, they would share their strategies with the other countries in order to ensure consistency, feedback and engagement could take place.

Even though the approach to conducting the survey/audit eventually varied in each country as shown in Section 4, research teams followed a structured framework for collecting the data to ensure meaningful information was gathered for each context to enable pertinent cross-country comparisons.



ActionAid, Burundi

## SECTION 4

# In-country data collection, analysis and validation processes



Gideon Mwendu/Corbis/ActionAid

### Research process

#### **Research process: Burundi, Malawi and Senegal.**

In Burundi, Malawi and Senegal, the research teams first collected national-level data on education budgets; recruitment and training of teachers; parental participation; and student outcomes. Data was gathered at the national level and through district-level government and NGO offices in the two selected districts.

**The survey/audit was conducted in two different stages within each country: at the national/district and school/community levels. This fostered an iterative process for refining instruments and sharing lessons across the four countries.**

The four national ILOPS teams gathered often for focus group discussions and interviews both in community and home settings. In total, they interviewed 6,850 stakeholders across the four countries including:

199	headteachers
1,591	teachers
1,636	parents
1,929	pupils
604	SMC/PTA members
808	community leaders
38	decision-makers at the national level and,
45	decision-makers at the district level

through focus group discussions at home, in community settings and home visits.

Precise criteria for selecting the two districts was elaborated during the Sesse Workshop and included: one district with good and one with poor student learning outcomes; one urban and one rural (or peri-urban) district; a mix of trained and untrained/undertrained teachers; and familiarity with the community. The following districts were included: Bururi and Karusi (Burundi); Machinga and Mchinji (Malawi); Foudigougne and Tambacounda (Senegal); and Kalangala and Masindi (Uganda).

Within these two districts, 60 schools were chosen based on either student achievement levels (good/poor) or number of teachers (trained/unqualified). There was also a mix of rural and urban schools within this sampling.

The data collected in the 60 schools and surrounding communities included: profiles of current teachers in service (training and academic levels, contractual terms); levels and type of participation of parents in school governance and in their children's education; student achievement and areas of desired competency as viewed by different stakeholders; and current roles and expectations of different stakeholders in improving learning outcomes.

**Research process: Uganda.** In Uganda, the in-country team chose to reverse the steps and start with the local-level mapping first, which in turn informed the national survey and policy mapping. This trial innovation of simultaneous implementation permitted useful exchanges of experiences and lessons that were then applied to subsequent work phases across the other countries. While it was empowering to have the local level responses

influence and focus the broader policy and budget type data collected at district and national levels, this approach also taught us a valuable lesson early on in the Project. Given that we had not yet defined clear criteria for choosing 60 schools when we started data collection, we ended up with an enormous sample from over 250 schools. This overwhelmed both the collection and analysis process. In the end, we applied the criteria for choosing 60 schools directly to the overall data sample, resulting in a more manageable selection to analyse. The data from the remaining 190 schools has provided a rich evidence base for working with these communities and schools on other projects.

### **In-country data analysis and validation workshops**

Upon completion of both national then local data collection, each country organised two data analysis workshops to explore the emerging issues. These workshops were organised to support the iterative, participatory process of the ILOPS Project, which aimed to engage a wider set of stakeholders in discussing the findings throughout the year.

**Analysis workshops.** In each country, the core research team members invited Ministry of Education officials, along with other stakeholders, to jointly discuss the findings and assess resulting implications for policy, research, programme development and practice. The workshops were designed to achieve the following goals:

- 1 To sift and sort information – some teams organised and filled in data tables before the workshops while others preferred to do this together during the workshops, before the analysis began
- 2 To develop a methodology for analysing the results, identifying data gaps and a strategy for collecting the missing information
- 3 To analyse the findings and debate outcomes, challenge perceptions and understanding of the issues. This involved identifying (a) key findings; (b) contradictions in data coming from the different sources –revealing gaps between policy, perception and practice; and (c) two surprisingly negative and positive aspects from the findings
- 4 To discuss implications for each stakeholder group
- 5 To apply lessons and challenges to local level survey design and tools (or national in the case of Uganda)
- 6 To develop a workplan for the local survey including recruitment of other team members from schools and communities (or national level as in Uganda).

The opportunity to peer-assess the research findings and process was an essential component of this process. For instance, research teams were held accountable for the rigorousness of their data collection and were challenged to explain the missing information. This process often led to discussions around how best to locate and compile data within particular countries. These opportunities also required all stakeholders to address challenges associated with the accessibility of information. The participation of a wider range of stakeholders facilitated the gathering of missing data as many of the constituents who had access to specific pieces of information were present at the analysis workshop. This dialogue brought to light the need for information that had been difficult for research team members to access to become publicly available to all stakeholders and citizens.

**Validation meetings.** Once the data was analysed and collated into a draft report, country teams organised ‘validation meetings’ with a larger number of stakeholders at the national, district and local levels. These sessions created even wider platforms for discussing the findings, debating assumptions and perceptions that contradicted the survey data and dialoguing around the roles and expectations of stakeholders.

**Discussion forums.** Some countries also organised discussion forums around specific topics. As a result of the emerging findings, the teachers’ union in Uganda, UNATU, organised several meetings between qualified and underqualified teachers to discuss training and professional development needs. This was the first time the union had accepted the need to reach out to these underqualified teachers. It was also the first time they discussed the role of teachers in encouraging parental participation and their responsibility to enhance student learning. Similarly, the Education Coalition in Burundi teamed with the research team colleagues from the teachers’ unions and IDEC researchers to organise and host a national policy forum. This event marked the first time civil society was able to access a platform and provide input for the Ministry of Education’s draft policy.

**Dissemination events.** At the end of the project, the four ILOPS countries each held three large dissemination meetings to discuss the findings at the national level and within the two participating districts. Additional sessions with the communities and schools that had been visited were also undertaken to discuss the results of the findings and implications for stakeholders’ roles.

## SECTION 5

# Cross-country findings

## Workshop 2

### Discussing cross-country findings

In November 2008, the same partners who attended the Sesse Workshop in April gathered in Bujumbura, Burundi for another five-day workshop to discuss the findings from the in-country research and plan the next steps. Based on the positive feedback from participants on the structure and process of the Sesse Workshop, the Bujumbura Workshop followed a similar, participatory design. Participants worked together with their national team colleagues, as well as cross-country colleagues and expert groups (Table 3).

Table 3

### Overview of five-day cross-country research findings workshop

<b>Goal</b>		To share experiences, compare research findings, and develop follow-on activities.		
<b>Day</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Description</b>		<b>Output</b>
<b>1</b> Share research experience	In and cross-country teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Explore and compare experiences, challenges and lessons learned from participating in ILOPS</li> <li>➤ Share country approaches and challenges in collecting, compiling and analysing data</li> </ul>		Sharing of personal, organisational, local and national-level learning
<b>2</b> Share findings from country surveys and prioritise follow-on activities	In-country teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Comparative analysis of common factors, differences and unique/surprise findings</li> <li>➤ Prioritisation of five key findings</li> <li>➤ Mapping how five findings link to learning outcomes and what their follow up activities would be</li> <li>➤ Peer review process led to constant refinement of activities</li> </ul>		Ranking plans on strategic value, feasibility and comparative advantage of each implementation team
<b>3</b> Stakeholder roles and expectations in future activities	In-country teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teams mapped stakeholders and their roles against the findings and actions developed in Day 2</li> <li>➤ Further refinement of activities</li> </ul>		Refinement of activities and clarity in roles of stakeholders
<b>4</b> Planning matrix for follow-on plans	In-country teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop implementation plan for each of the five activities</li> <li>➤ Draw timeframe to determine if it can be achieved in three year's time</li> <li>➤ Develop theories of change (similar to conceptual model) to clarify how these actions jointly lead to improving learning</li> </ul>		Planning matrix included: objective; activity; implementation plan; output/intermediate outcomes; indicators; means of verification; and ultimate outcome
<b>5</b> Agreeing on next steps	In-country teams plus entire group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Discuss finalisation of research reports, dissemination and discussion forums</li> <li>➤ Plans for developing follow-on proposals with key stakeholders</li> <li>➤ Outline of project evaluation</li> </ul>		Agree next steps for finalising research reports, follow-on activities and final evaluation
<b>Outcome</b>	<i>Analysis of key findings and how future activities can support parents and teachers in innovative efforts to improve learning outcomes.</i>			

# Lessons learned on collaborative approaches

**The ILOPS process demonstrates that a national and cross-country strategy for designing, collecting and analysing data can significantly deepen our understanding of how things really function at the ground level. Based on our experience, this process is more likely to produce plans that are genuinely locally owned, relevant and evidence-based. In turn, because stakeholders have invested in the process and believe in the authenticity of the data, they are more likely to use the evidence to promote positive change.**

Within ILOPS, authentic multi-stakeholder participation meant more than mere consultation – it actually involved coming together to conduct research on subjects that directly concerned the stakeholders. This type of collaboration offers the potential to bring differences into the open, facilitate discussion and create the space for reflection, culminating in the joint identification of ways forward. The process can also nurture new professional relationships and opportunities for national and local stakeholders to work together.

Recruiting and nurturing productive multi-stakeholder teams is only the first step of the process. A team can only conduct purposeful and well-designed research if there is a clearly defined, shared sense of purpose and process. This requires constantly revising survey instruments to ensure they remain focused on the central goal of the project.

## Learning on collaborative approaches

Committing to a collaborative approach that brings stakeholders together from the very inception of a cross-country project requires patience, time, regular ongoing communication and resources. It is a cumbersome process, but as many of the ILOPS participants shared in the final evaluation, it is necessary in order to facilitate relevant and productive change. The entire process is very much as important as its outcomes.

The role of the Project Coordinator in supporting this regular exchange is crucial. Leadership, however, must be extended beyond the Coordinator. All team members should be encouraged to ‘take charge’ of different components of the survey. This ‘team’ approach created a climate of peer accountability, placing equal responsibility for consistency, rigour and quality of outputs in everyone’s hands.

The participatory nature of the cross-country workshops was a particularly important step, not only for bringing people together and designing the research but also for agreeing on common research tools and methodologies. This process facilitated the creation of a comparative context within which participants built their capacities in ‘sharpening the interventions based on research’. Overall, collaboration facilitates learning, as shared by a participant during the end of project evaluation:

*You maximize on other people’s knowledge, because obviously there are some things you learn from other people, the way they do things even their own understanding of things. To that extent it was a benefit to us as an institution, we interacted with people around the globe and worked with them.*

(Edge et al., 2009b: 16)

## Challenges

As with all projects, there were challenges. From the outset, participants agreed on the need to establish open dialogue, debate and trust among the research team members. However, they all underestimated the amount of time required to build a solid team. This created frustrations, especially at the beginning of the Project when partners were eager to get on with the research. Secondly, the involvement of a wide range of actors (which changed between the national and local survey) was not free of conflict. Balancing different interests, opinions and perspectives within the team required regular communication, healthy debate and accepting the need to disagree in order to agree on common goals.

Another key challenge was balancing the collection of vast amounts of data (which may be useful in understanding the context within each country and locality) and securing data that can be meaningfully processed and used. Finding a way to strike a balance – between collecting too much information (and therefore losing the main thread or sharp analysis) and focusing too narrowly (and therefore losing the interconnections) – is essential.

The authors of the final project evaluation point out that in spite of the challenges, participants did appreciate the collaborative process very much, and felt it facilitated the production of high quality outcomes:

*Participants state that they realised good research which engages in multiple partnerships takes time – a valuable resource not readily available to all stakeholders at the same time or capacity. This, together with differing perspectives and at times conflicting interests or methods of working have presented themselves as the main challenges in this project. However, participants also share that when working towards an ultimate important common goal, such as student outcomes, the benefits outweigh the challenges as stakeholders come to hold each other accountable and find ways to manage the difficulties while maintaining cohesion.*

(Edge et al. 2009ab: 18)

## Recommendations for future practice

We hope the ILOPS collaborative approach and tools will offer practical examples and guidance for those undertaking similar efforts. In summary, we would like to propose five key recommendations:

- 1 **Start with small steps.** Accept that time, regular contact and patience is required. Set a limited number of tasks for each meeting and review lessons learned before moving forward.
- 2 **Commit to national and international research reviews.** A systematic literature and resource review at the beginning of research efforts can guide the collection of data and ensure the focus remains on uncovering gaps in knowledge.
- 3 **Focus your research.** In order to balance the collection of basic information and specific data, stagger the data collection at different levels. Whether you begin with the national/district level or local level, take the time to refine survey instruments to facilitate a more manageable collection of data at the next stage.
- 4 **Embed iterative cycles of design and analysis.** An iterative process of design and analysis enables learning, the opportunity to focus and revise instruments and creates a climate of peer accountability. It also enables reflection upon one's own practice and roles and this behaviour either contributes to or hinders progress. A strong team is able to ensure high quality outputs.
- 5 **Learn from gathering evidence before designing innovation.** Adequate time is required to process the findings and discuss implications for future policy, practice and research. Frequent workshops and forums with a wide range of stakeholders can support ongoing analysis of research findings, and identification of practical, realistic and feasible solutions.

# Recommendations for improving learning outcomes

**The ILOPS Project confirms that national and local policies and practices do not always support the development of teacher quality or greater parental engagement in the process of improving student learning outcomes. The research also echoes the findings from our literature review and reinforces the need for a greater understanding of how policy and practice intersect to support teachers and parents so that true improvements in student learning can occur. Building this knowledge base requires facilitating exchanges between different actors, drawing out their view points and exploring the roles and obligations of each stakeholder in the process.**

Encouraging the active participation of key stakeholders in the research effort can help them to move beyond being passive receptors (e.g. listening to findings from consultant-led research) and functional participants in improving education (e.g. parents building schools) to jointly diagnosing the core issues affecting education in each country. The shared knowledge developed by parents, teachers, government officials and NGOs around the constraints can lead to locally derived, practical and sustainable solutions. The partnerships strengthened through this process also create more open space for wider debate and advocacy on the key elements required to make schools more effective and to improve student

outcomes. This process may well increase government accountability for providing high quality education to all children.

The partnerships that are either created or strengthened through this effort will be well placed to implement the recommendations that arise from the findings. The engagement of the Ministry of Education from the onset means that there is an openness to external inputs and a real prospect for policy reform (rather than resistance) – while the engagement of civil society means any relevant policy reform will be understood and supported right through to implementation.

## Findings from ILOPS research

Overall, the ILOPS findings point to a genuine ‘crisis in education’. The evidence suggests that parents in all four countries are questioning the importance of schooling and thus rethinking the need to invest in education, especially for girls. This perception is driven by:

- A breakdown of the relationships between teachers/headteachers and parents
- Shortages of trained teachers and the absence of good quality pre- and in-service training programmes to support professional development
- Poor quality teaching and learning as indicated by low student achievement levels
- Lack of coherent links between what is taught in school and tested in exams, and what parents and children would like to learn
- Mistaken assumptions about the roles of each stakeholder as other stakeholders see them
- How each stakeholder can and does actually contribute and constraints to their contribution
- Fragmentation between education groups, including education coalitions, teachers’ unions, universities/research institutes, etc. which leads to weak advocacy.

Though on the surface these findings may not seem revolutionary, the volume of data upon which they are based, the identification of the root causes and each stakeholder's role in improving these challenges has resulted in a significant leap forward in education advocacy. In addition, several new understandings within each country have emerged throughout the process. For example, in Burundi teams noted that achievement results were in fact available at the district level despite the centralised approach to data collection. This will now enable them to track progress in achievement across different areas of the country, learn from promising strategies and better target their programmes accordingly. In Malawi and Senegal the local mapping revealed a substantial number of volunteer and underqualified teachers despite government rhetoric of either reducing these numbers or stating they did not exist. The involvement of the Ministry in the mapping led to greater acceptance of these findings and a commitment to change data collection methods as well as to consider revisiting the teacher recruitment, management and training policies. In Uganda, feedback from parents led the unions, coalitions and Reflect group to consider how to make their interaction with communities and parents more participatory. Until now, civil society did not necessarily consider that communities could contribute to discussions on quality of education given the high adult illiteracy rates.

## Examples of follow-on work

One of the main goals of the ILOPS research was to apply the results to improvement and innovation in education. A sample of the activities being conducted by the four countries is featured in Table 4. The same partners as those involved in the initial survey will be implementing these new activities, though in some cases new partners with specialised knowledge in specific areas have joined the teams. Participants continue to use a range of participatory techniques to involve parents, communities, pupils, teachers and the government in these efforts. The goal remains to improve learning outcomes.



ActionAid, Burundi

## Conclusion

The ILOPS project and follow-on activities seek to provide an effective framework for deepening understanding of the role of parents and teachers in improving students' learning achievement. We believe that all stakeholders concerned must play an active role in both identifying the obstacles and developing practical solutions. The joint collaborative work conducted by stakeholder's shows that genuine engagement in all steps of the research process can be an empowering exercise. It can raise awareness around the current state of education and each actor's role in both improving learning and also holding the government accountable for fulfilling children's right to good quality education.

Table 4

**Examples of follow-on activities in 2009**

<b>Country Focus</b>				
	<b>Education advocacy</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Parental and community participation</b>	<b>Learning outcomes</b>
<b>Senegal</b>	Use ILOPS evidence to advocate against politicians/leaders recruiting teachers without any examination or control of academic qualifications and aptitudes ('quota sécuritaire').	Facilitate the coordination of all bodies in charge of different aspects of teachers' training, namely teachers' training colleges, district education inspectorates and regional training centres (poleregional de formation).	Invigorate Reflect circles to offer adult literacy. Identify community-based tutors to provide systematic support to children with low learning achievement. Tutors to be regularly monitored by the Reflect circle members.	Organise a forum of education actors for collective reflection on how tight collaboration between schools and the community can improve learning outcomes using a charter, or shared vision and objectives.
<b>Burundi</b>	Assess capacity of newly formed education coalition and identify areas for support including advocacy for a Legal Framework for Advocacy between civil society and the government.	Undertake a study to determine the actual demand for qualified teachers and training needs of current underqualified teachers. The 'costing' exercise will result in lobbying for increased budgets.	Strengthen PTAs and SMCs: ensure structures are democratic, provide space for women to participate and have an activities plan to ensuring learning is taking place in school and children are achieving.	Advocate for reform of policies in new education strategy: reform outdated teacher training; clarity in language policy; policy on achievement and learning outcomes, standardisation of evaluation mechanisms.
<b>Malawi</b>	Translate education policy commitments (and government obligations) into local languages so citizens are informed of their rights and roles and are able to identify if these are appropriate, realistic and feasible.	Develop framework to monitor recruitment of volunteer teachers. For all teachers, assess capacity, competency and training needs. Advocate for good quality pre and on-the-job training.	Train and raise awareness among parents and pupils on the importance of education and parental responsibility/obligations to send children to school.	Design a learning outcome monitoring survey to track student achievement in not only examinable subjects but also life skills.
<b>Uganda</b>	Translate education policy commitments (and government obligations) into local languages so citizens are informed of their rights and roles and are able to identify if these are appropriate, realistic and feasible.	Revise 'Teachers' Code of Conduct' to reflect roles in improving learning and advocating for improved professional development programmes.	Build on work of Reflect circles to regularly talk about learning outcomes, parental participation and teacher effectiveness. IEC materials, radio and TV will all be used to sensitise and monitor engagement and address challenges.	Design a learning outcome monitoring survey to track student achievement in not only examinable subjects but also life skills.

**Source:** Funding proposals for ILOPS follow-on projects in 2009 from ActionAid Burundi; ActionAid Malawi; ActionAid Senegal and ActionAid Uganda

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