

# **Review of the Elimu Campaign**

**May 2002**

## **CONTENTS**

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
2. TACKLING CAUSES NOT JUST SYMPTONS
3. BUILDING FROM THE BASE
4. STRATEGISING
5. RESEARCH
6. IMPACT ON NATIONAL POLICIES
7. CHALLENGES AT NATIONAL LEVEL
8. CHALLENGES AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL
9. MEDIA
10. PEOPLE POWER
11. GENDER
12. SECRETARIAT
13. FUTURE ROLE

## **APPENDIX**

## 1. Summary of Findings

1. Elimu is perceived as an unusual and innovative campaign because of its efforts and successes in involving Southern CSOs as equal allies rather than as dependant “partners”.
2. There is evidence of significant change in the political landscape shaping education policy in countries taking part in the campaign. In many Elimu countries, NGOs and CSOs are pressing for accountable, pro-poor policies for the first time and in an organised and sustained manner. Governments are beginning to feel the need to sit up and take notice.
3. Building national campaign coalitions first, then gradually defining a common policy change agenda based on emerging concerns of the national campaigns, has allowed the flexibility necessary for genuine local ownership of the international effort.
4. The secretariat management structure has proved successful in ensuring that there has been no concentration of management responsibility and political decision-making in the hands of a single “campaign head”.
5. National coalitions have won access to policy forums and have the basic foundations in place for exploiting this new “space” effectively. Enthusiasm for doing related and complementary work towards international and regional targets is high. The challenge now is how to translate credibility and capacity into real impact both nationally and internationally.
6. Should Elimu decide to rise to this challenge, some of the structural weaknesses of the international campaign will need to be addressed, such as continuing dependence on and control by Actionaid, and the lack of a clear membership structure. Alternatively, it was suggested by some that Elimu may decide to reposition itself as a capacity-building and experience-sharing network for education activists, continuing to support national coalitions in these areas while ceasing to be a campaign that pursues specific policy change goals of its own.
7. The review also raises major issues about the overloading of Actionaid staff involved in the campaign. Country programme staff were typically told to add the campaign to an already unmanageable list of responsibilities, with the result that few Actionaid staff had more than 2 to 3 days per month available for campaign work at all levels.
8. Finally, it was evident that monitoring and evaluation had been very weak during the first two years of the campaign. However, the self-assessment process seemed to enthuse most who took part of the strategic indispensability of monitoring the progress of ongoing advocacy.

## 2. Tackling causes, not just symptoms

**“When Actionaid first came to us asking for support to enable NGOs to form networks and become policy interlocutors on education, we were very sceptical. I still think that in most countries there is a very long way to go before NGOs will be able to sit round the table with government and donors as equals and really hold their own. The difference is that I now recognise that it is possible, and essential that we do get to that point, and that is not what I would have said two years ago.”**

*(Senior donor agency source based in Southern Africa)*

Busy delivering services in a bid to patch up the gaps, NGOs working in the education sector by and large failed to offer systematic critiques of the policy and spending choices of governments and donors. Some NGOs working in the field, particularly in Latin America and parts of South Asia, are motivated by radical ideals of justice and equality, but their vision, if any, has too often narrowed down to the creation of islands of progressive methodology in a few carefully nurtured “alternative” literacy projects or schools. In many countries, the debilitating legacy of years of government attempts to control and suppress civil society activism inhibited cooperation among NGOs even at the level of experience-sharing, and had discouraged them from any attempt to speak out – collectively or separately – on the devastating and avoidable crisis in education facing their countries. Even at the local level,

**“NGO and civil society involvement in the management and implementation of education policies is just on paper but not in practice”**

*(Ghana)*

Writing in early 2000, **Mozambique** admitted that despite their:

**“...passion and commitment to education [and] direct contact with education realities on the ground”, CSOs lack awareness about national education strategies, lack cohesion, research, in depth analysis and creativity. CSOs are therefore unable to contribute to sophisticated debates with government, World Bank and donor experts, and hence are not being taken seriously by current policy makers.”**

The stakeholders participating in this review felt that the Elimu campaign has played an important part in beginning to change this rather dismal landscape. In a period of 12 to 18 months, following the campaign’s establishment in January 1999, nearly all of the 14 AA country programmes participating in the campaign have helped to build strong national coalitions that have gained the recognition and growing respect of other civil society organisations, governments and donors as the legitimate, collective NGO voice on education and as credible, well-informed interlocutors in the policy arena.

**“To a great extent, ActionAid’s strategy of working with partners and alliances worked well in the Elimu campaign in Nigeria. Civil society groups that were hitherto alienated from the policy process in the education sector, have come to gain**

**confidence in themselves as equal stakeholders and are demanding greater democratization of the policy process and accountability from government”.**

*(Nigeria)*

**“AA Malawi has managed to bring all key stakeholders in basic education together through the formation of an NGO- GOVT Alliance for basic education in Malawi. This body has created a platform from where all issues affecting basic education are discussed. Our ability to mobilize all stakeholders to form an education network for both NGOs and government ... is definitely our strength.”**

*(Malawi)*

Emerging Elimu education coalitions devoted much of their effort to building trust within the networks, developing a shared discourse amongst members, establishing their legitimacy, and finally, opening doors with government. Most self-assessments were very positive about the results:

**“The government now sees GNECC as a partner in the development and implementation of education policies and practice.”**

*(Ghana)*

**“There were initial suspicion and doubts about our representation, motives, but [this] has been resolved by our persistent, subtle and hard pushes and the credibility of members.”**

*(Nigeria)*

By the same token, a growing number of INGOs, local NGOs and CBOs have been “converted” to the idea of working together in order to influence policy and practice.

- “Right from the start in April 1999 there was a lot of energy and enthusiasm behind the network,” reports TEN-MET in **Tanzania**, which now has over 200 member organisations, most of them community-based organisations and locally based NGOs.
- QTI in **Pakistan** reported over 200 members
- Elimu Yetu in **Kenya** had signed up 40 organisations
- CSACEFA in **Nigeria** had 60.

**“We are also changing the way that we think and other NGOs think. Before this campaign began, NGOs just wanted to ensure funding and profile for their own projects. No one was interested in having a common voice on education as civil society.”**

*(Uganda)*

Thus, in many ways, Elimu has contributed to a gradual shift among local and international NGOs in participating countries, away from a purely welfarist approach to

education service delivery, and towards willingness, capacity and credibility to engage on the contested terrain of rights, accountability and public mobilisation. Wider trends have probably helped to push NGOs further in this direction, but Elimu was felt to have made a direct and widely influential contribution, as much through the evident successes of its participatory approach to advocacy, as through its explicit positions and ideology. A senior manager from one of the larger AA country programmes, who has since left the organisation, commented:

**“When it was said that Actionaid would have a campaign on education, we expected that we would have massive drives to provide scholarships and build classrooms and launch REFLECT programmes across the country – the same things as we have always done, but in a bigger way... But as the thing unfolded we realised that the more fundamental issue was not what Actionaid could do but what government should do and wasn’t doing. This was a very different approach for us and for our partners. If we had been told from the start that we must go and demand the rights of the poor for education, we would have rejected the whole thing. Instead the Elimu approach is to let people develop this analysis for themselves, but all the time raising new questions, new perspectives for us through activities like the report cards and budget tracking.”**

### **3. Building from the base**

For most national coalitions, a strong connection with community-level organisations and the ability to represent their issues was seen as crucial to their legitimacy and ultimate success. The following comment from **Tanzania** was typical:

**“The network’s accountability and credibility ultimately rests at community level [which is] the locus of the work of most member NGOs and CBOs within TEN/MET, including supporting improvements in local level management and advocacy such as through school committees.”**

Many countries had also made substantial efforts to build provincial sub-networks or to develop other forms of subnational organising that are more accessible and responsive to local groups. Many countries had also made substantial efforts to build provincial sub-networks or to develop other forms of subnational organising that are more accessible and responsive to local groups.

In **Pakistan**, the national network QTI had taken advantage of decentralisation reforms to form:

**“...strong pressure groups in the Province of Sindh to carry out lobbying and pressurising authorities for better quality of education. The CBOs in collaboration with other civil society groups have managed to pressurize authorities in their area to evacuate the premises of two schools, which were unlawfully taken over by the police and converted into a police station.”**

*(Pakistan)*

There was also experimentation with participatory advocacy methods as a way of building a community base for the campaign. Actionaid **Bangladesh** had developed a wide range of participatory advocacy activities in partnership with local NGOs, such as participatory video as a tool for pressurizing local administration to deliver better performing schools, citizens' report cards as the basis for local campaigns on the quality of education, capacity building, training and support for local NGOs on participatory advocacy, and workshops for PTAs/SMCs, community leaders and religious leaders.

Actionaid **Kenya** and Actionaid **Brazil** had also launched partnerships with local NGOs to undertake participatory budget tracking and budget influencing projects at local level, which were closely linked to advocacy on the national education budget. In **The Gambia**, creative use was made of community radio, traditional songs, promotional T-shirts, and puppet shows to convey campaign messages, and. Actionaid took advantage of the fact that the April 2000 World Education Forum was taking place in neighbouring Senegal to sponsor the participation of several PTA representatives in this event.

In most cases, campaigners felt that addressing immediate education problems in a practical way was very important to sustain the interest and engagement of community members, so that local activism tended to be a "mixed bag" of self-help projects, awareness raising and advocacy. The closer one got to the grassroots, the less it was possible to make hard-and-fast distinctions between advocacy projects and welfare projects. For example, the Nyanza province chapter of **Kenya's** Elimu Yetu Coalition had launched an initiative to start a school for street children and had persuaded local churches to equip it; the Ashanti Region of the **Ghana** coalition started a school fund with support from a local dignitary. Actionaid **Nepal** says an important lesson from it's dalits' campaign is that:

**"...service delivery -- when approached correctly -- can work hand in hand with advocacy and rights based campaigns. SCDF [AA Nepal partner]'s history of delivering critical services to the community helped its initial organising efforts because the organisation had gained the community's trust and had a base of contacts in the area. Its traditional service delivery had helped establish a small measure of security within the community (through women's savings and credit groups), leadership skills (through user groups) and community involvement – all factors that ultimately supported organising efforts."**

*(Nepal)*

#### **4. Strategizing**

In some countries, campaign actions, lobby interventions, research, media work, etc. were seemingly undertaken in a somewhat ad hoc way; they were not necessarily tied together by a closely integrated step-by-step strategy for building pressure on, and allies among, decision-makers.

This may have been partly related to a dearth of seasoned activists to advise those managing the campaign; it is notable that in countries with a long tradition of political

activism and a large pool of skilled organisers, such as **Brazil** and **Kenya**, education campaigns were more tightly planned.

However, it is also worth bearing in mind that most national coalitions felt that it was very important to maintain a decentralised, fluid approach to activities, and that achieving policy change was only one of many functions that their members wanted them to serve. In this situation, less is not necessarily more. As a loose network makes the risky transition to becoming a focused coalition pursuing narrowly defined advocacy goals, it may be more important to have “lots going on” than to attempt to concentrate everyone’s attention and energy on those goals.

## 5. Research

Research reports had been prepared and disseminated in nearly all countries to back up campaign positions and messages. In some cases it is clear that research has made a significant impact. Many people were able to point to cases where their research directly influenced the content of their government’s official progress report to UNESCO on education for all goals. However, most research had remained at the level of a general situation analysis of the state of education, enabling campaigns in their early stages to argue that “education in this country is in a bad way and something must be done about it”. By its nature, this type of research did not exploit CSOs’ on-the-ground experience and linkages in any direct, detailed way.

More focused, in-depth research on particular issues, based on CSO knowledge of local realities, was urgently needed. There were, however, some interesting models that could be shared more widely among members of the Elimu network, such as:

- the participatory research on education costs done by one of the **Tanzanian** NGOs involved in TEN-MET, and since replicated by others;
- the annual “Education Watch” report done by CAMPE in **Bangladesh**, which in 2000 and 2001 produced evidence that only 25% of primary school students achieve meaningful literacy;
- a study of the political manipulation of adult literacy statistics in **Brazil**;
- a detailed study of education costs and financing by Actionaid **Pakistan**, comparing what was budgeted for education to what was actually spent, and investigating the reasons for the rise of private schools catering to low income households;
- careful, rigorous evaluation of the ACCESS non-formal partnership between NGOs and government in **Ethiopia**.

## 6. Impact on National Policies

By mid-2001, all of the national coalitions surveyed had developed a strategy or plan that identified specific aspects of government policy that needed to be changed, or specific actions that government needed to take, in order to fulfil the right to education, although some of these plans were more concrete and action-oriented than others. It is interesting that most of the plans hinged on the demand that government meet the goals and commitments made during the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, as well as or instead of being framed around purely national goals and promises on education. This suggests that national coalitions were able to translate international processes and discourses into an additional source of focus, legitimacy and moral force for national advocacy – a point discussed further below.

Most national networks felt that they had influenced national government to take the Dakar commitments more seriously and to move more quickly to establish the participatory planning processes promised in Dakar, and some felt that their role in this had been decisive.

They also mentioned their contribution to informing lower level government officials of the Dakar goals. Many had gained places in key policy arenas such as PRSP subcommittees on education, education sector plans, National EFA Forums, etc. and had increasing access to senior officials of the Ministry of Education (**Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nepal, Brazil, The Gambia, Pakistan, Nigeria**).

Crucially, networks demanded and in most cases were given places for the network in its own right rather than to individual organisations belonging to it. Several reported that the Ministry had begun to seek out advice or information from them on specific issues (**Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya**).

Promising signs of influence over policy could already be seen in concrete changes to policy and/or discourse in areas as diverse as increased recognition of the role of PTAs (**The Gambia**), partial or comprehensive removal of education charges (**Tanzania, Nepal**), inclusive education (**Bangladesh, Uganda**), adult literacy (**Uganda**), non-formal education (**Ethiopia**).

Even having pried open the door to participation in policymaking forums, civil society's influencing efforts soon come up against the limited power and capacity of Ministries of Education to implement and resource their own policies:

**“Government plans are confined to paper only. [Due to] lack of transparency and weaknesses in policies, implementation of programs have always been ineffective. Necessary commitments and work plans to ensure compulsory, free and quality education for the children of the backward communities and ethnic minorities by the year 2001 have not been made yet.”**

*(Nepal)*

Influencing such documents is, in itself, not likely to produce dramatic results on the ground:

**“NGOs have striven to engage themselves in the process of developing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and through TEN/MET were able to ensure that the education part of the NGO submission was strongly written. The extension from this into a real impact on the poverty strategy is much less clear.”**

*(Tanzania)*

In this connection, it is worrying that few of the self-assessments mentioned having successfully targeted other key policy-makers beyond the Ministry of Education, such as senior officials in the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, President’s office, and bilateral or multilateral donor agencies, or members of important Parliamentary committees. In late 2000, **Tanzania** observed that had yet to develop a good understanding of government structures and how they interconnect and hence the ways in which they can be influenced – though the network has been on a steep learning curve since then.

**Nepal, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi** and **Brazil** had made some inroads with parliamentarians, and Elimu-sponsored education budget tracking work in **Bangladesh** had opened up a dialogue with the Finance ministry.

## **7. Challenges at the National Level**

In a few instances, Actionaid has been able to lend additional support to a well-established or already emerging national education network. In most cases, however, Actionaid was one of two or three organisations responsible for getting the network or coalition off the ground, often convening or co-convening the first meetings and providing most or all of the initial funding, and carried much of the burden of taking forward the actions agreed in these early meetings. The most successful coalitions appear to be those where Actionaid staff had time and money available to invest heavily in the formation and early development of the network, but subsequently have been able to step back from power. **Tanzania** said that the credibility of their coalition, both in the eyes of government and in the eyes of other NGOs, depended on all stakeholders seeing it as a locally owned network responding to locally generated issues. In line with this view, several country programmes said that they played a “facilitating” role within the network: carefully encouraging other organisations to take on leadership functions, helping to establish participatory and democratic decision-making within the network and assisting members to clarify and focus their aims, as well as providing funds and occasional technical support.

In a few countries, however, networks founded by Actionaid were less successful in establishing independence. Actionaid **Malawi** noted that they did not put up a very strategic sustainability plan of the alliance and this led to over dependency on Actionaid **Malawi**. They also noted that the independence of the Malawi NGO Government

Alliance is questionable, as there are no clearer plans to make it autonomous. Actionaid **Pakistan** found a lack of independence expressed in continuing expectations that Actionaid should pay for QTI members to attend meetings and undertake activities. Actionaid **India** said that part of the reason for the ultimate demise of the Citizens' Initiative on Elementary Education was that it always remained, and was perceived as, an Actionaid project.

The importance of fostering autonomy, as well as many of the practical difficulties faced in trying to do this, was seen to arise primarily from the enormous gap in the resources and power available to international NGOs on the one hand and local NGOs on the other hand (though some respondents would include well-funded, internationally networked national NGOs in the first category). According to one campaigner,

**“You [INGOs] are like the G7 and we [local CSOs] are like the G77. If we have partnerships with you as individual organisations, of course you are going to dominate us and push us around, because you are big and rich and we are tiny. Even if that is not what you think you are doing. But, if we organise ourselves, if we form a bloc like the G77, then the situation is more equal – there is more of a chance that we can influence your agenda instead of you setting ours.”**

The most keenly felt power disparity between INGOs and local CSOs often concerns access to and control over material resources (money, vehicles, computers, photocopiers). Tensions tend to arise over “who pays for what, how and when”, as **Nigeria** put it. In general, most Actionaid country programmes adopted a transparent approach in regard to finances, were flexible about reporting, and did not expect to “own” or take credit for work that they had funded. In all of these respects, Actionaid's practices made a positive impression compared to other INGOs.

However, campaign allies were sometimes frustrated by the inability of Actionaid and other funders to commit long-term, predictable and flexible funds for the implementation of an agreed strategy. Actionaid **Nepal** observes that

**“In order for rights based work to take root, adequate funding must be devoted to the work. Although it does not involve material costs rights based work requires considerable human resources and administrative expenses. In particular, AAN should be sure to work directly with partners to develop a budget adequate to effectively carry out rights based work.”**

*(Nepal)*

However, most coalitions experienced a continual shortage of funds and faced particular difficulties over the lack of full-time staff to coordinate agreed activities, maintain a good level of communication and momentum, and raise further funds.

## 8. Challenges at the International Level

Lobbying of key donors and UN agencies, such as local missions of the World Bank, UNICEF, European Commission, USAID, etc., and research on the effects of their policies on local education systems, was not a strong dimension of most national campaigns, despite the fact that the role of donors was singled out for attention in the international strategy. Practical knowledge of the processes through which these actors influence government policies and budgets (e.g. Consultative Group meetings, Public Expenditure Reviews, PRSPs, sector-wide investment programmes) was felt to be lacking. However, there are signs that this may already be changing, such as the enthusiastic response by 12 countries to the opportunity to take part in a study (co-organised by Elimu, AAUSA, and two US NGOs) of cost recovery policies in education and health and the role of the World Bank in promoting such policies; and the increasing number of national coalitions that have targeted the national budget process and/or PRSP as an important influencing opportunity alongside of the Ministry of Education's own sectoral planning processes.

However, it is important to note that in the same period, Actionaid and other Elimu allies have played a major role in forming the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), an alliance between the worldwide teachers' union federation, four large international NGOs, Global March on Child Labour, several important regional education networks, and national education coalitions. The GCE has so far focused on lobbying international and Northern actors, such as the World Bank, Unicef, Unesco, and the G8, for increased aid to basic education.

Compared to Elimu, the GCE has so far had limited success in developing strong relationships with Southern CSOs. During and after the Dakar conference, the GCE faced harsh criticism for its superficial, even manipulative approach to partnership between Northern and Southern NGOs. Lack of a strong base at the national level has gradually begun to erode the effectiveness of the GCE in international advocacy; it has not been able to recruit a single Southern government to back its main lobby proposals, for example. The Elimu meeting in Rio, September 2000, nevertheless concluded that the GCE was an important vehicle for getting Elimu messages heard at the international level, and that all participants should actively join the GCE and fight to make it a more democratic, "bottom-up" and accountable body.

This strategy has been reasonably effective. Together with Actionaid, two national coalitions active in the Elimu campaign have served on the GCE Steering Committee since its inception in October 1999. The Elimu network has played a notable role in influencing GCE positions.

However, success in influencing Northern and international targets has been constrained by the relatively weak interest in such targets on the part of many Southern coalitions, at least to date. Few coalitions have responded to appeals to lobby national governments to put their weight behind efforts to change the policies and priorities of international agencies and institutions. During international and regional inter-governmental meetings,

the issue of greatest concern and urgency for most Southern national coalitions has so far been to achieve recognition of the legitimacy and value of civil society as an equal partner in national policy formulation. By contrast, Northern NGOs have been more interested in changing the aid and debt relief priorities of international financial institutions and bilateral and multilateral donors. A few respondents referred to Elimu's role in bridging this gap and preventing Northern and Southern partners from going off on different tracks, particularly by finding innovative ways to integrate and foreground participation in the international policy proposals of the GCE.

Elimu's ability to influence Northern and international targets was also constrained by lack of capacity in the North to take on the necessary work. Actionaid's EU lobbyist devoted part of her time to influencing EU aid to education in line with campaign goals during the period under review. However, no one from Actionaid's Northern Advocacy Unit (since renamed UKAT) or UK Press or UK Campaigns Department was assigned full or part time to the campaign during this same period. An ally in the GCE commented that Actionaid had developed strong and distinctive policy positions but simply seemed to lack the "manpower" needed to systematically lobby key Northern and international decision-makers.

There have been some indications, however, that the campaign has secured greater respect and recognition for Actionaid amongst bilateral and multilateral agencies, as well as with Southern governments. During 2000, sector strategies published by the World Bank and DfID mentioned the campaigning and advocacy work of Actionaid and Oxfam as a significant influence. UNESCO's first monitoring report on progress towards the Education for All goals since the Dakar Forum twice mentioned Actionaid's contributions to building capacity of civil society and supporting the formation of national and regional networks. AA was the only INGO mentioned in the chapter on civil society's role. Lobbying of the European Commission was particularly successful, establishing AA as probably the most influential NGO on European Union aid to education.

## 9. Media

Few countries, save **Ghana** and **Bangladesh**, had an aggressive strategy for using the media to influence public opinion. Actionaid **The Gambia** had conducted training for journalists in an effort to interest them in education stories, but this yielded limited success. Despite a dramatic and imaginative launch event in a busy train station, and despite a partnership with a community radio network, the **Brazil** campaign has found it difficult to sustain media interest.

The **Tanzania** network recognised a need to develop better targeted messages. It was notable that whilst all national coalitions had gotten some media coverage for campaign activities, most of them appeared to be using it primarily to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of their activities, rather than to create controversy around specific campaign issues. In other words, many of the news items that did appear were polite "seminar-at-the-Sheraton" stories (VIPs make wise and serious remarks to distinguished guests at a

seminar on the challenges facing education in our country today). Noteworthy exceptions were achieved in South Asia:

- **Bangladesh** got excellent media coverage of both its research on public and private education financing and of videos made by youth exposing the failings of local schools.
- Media-friendly efforts in **Nepal** included a provocative “expose” of the shambles in which the government had left rural schools, written by two investigative journalists; and a survey to establish how many public servants actually sent their children to the public schools.
- The Karnataka branch of the Citizens’ Initiative on Elementary Education (CIEE) in **India** received NORAD funding to poll 25,000 people on the government’s handling of a teachers’ strike. The poll was topical, but also provided an opportunity to raise wider issues in the media, such decentralisation reforms; and to recruit new volunteers.

Failure to generate media interest beyond “seminar-at-the-Sheraton” level was related to the lack of clear “villains” around which a good story about education could be constructed, and/or the political sensitivity of identifying villains even when some likely candidates did exist. African coalitions, in particular, found it risky to generate provocative or conflictual stories:

**“The debt campaign was very lucky in that they could pick on foreigners as the bad guys – the IMF, the World Bank and so on. When the responsibility lies here at home it is much more difficult. There is massive corruption in our education system and our members know who is to blame, down to the names and addresses of the individual officials. But it has taken us a whole year to even be able to discuss such highly political issues in a coded way within our own network, and if we went public with them, we would be at high risk of losing credibility with government, because we would be seen as playing into the hands of the opposition parties.”**

*(Former Campaign member, Ghana)*

## **10. People Power**

According to the Midwest Academy, which has trained community organisers for decades, actions such as rallies, petitions, marches, concerts and the like are important because they give people a sense of their own power – and because they are fun. **Malawi** summed up their “big walk” for the right to education, which attracted more than 1000 participants, in the following terms

**“It was a wonderful day.”**

*( Malawi)*

In the early stages of the Elimu campaign, many participants expressed trepidation about how such displays of “people power” would be received by governments that were already wary of NGOs, and whether it wouldn’t be more productive to stick to insider lobbying. It was therefore surprising and encouraging to find that nearly every national coalition, and/or subnational networks where these existed, had organised at least one (sometimes several) popular actions every year, and that these stood out as highlights for the coalition members.

## 11. Gender

Most self-assessments reported a 50:50 or better gender balance on the governing structures of the national coalition, though to our knowledge only the **Nigeria** coalition had made this an explicit provision of its constitution.

Many national networks had a good representation of feminist and/or women’s organisations amongst their membership, with **Nigeria** again achieving outstanding success in this area. It was not possible to establish how many of them had feminist and/or women’s organisations on their management committee or playing a convening role, though we know this to be true in **Mozambique** and **Tanzania**.

At international level, Elimu lobby teams for all major forums such as the Dakar conference and the UN Special Session on Children preparatory process were at least 50% female. The Elimu ICT was composed of 4 women and 1 man during 2000 but then reversed to 4 men and 1 woman by mid 2001.

In the first few Elimu meetings there was a sense that gender issues had to be “forced” onto the agenda by the campaign coordinator and ICT, as few country programmes or allies were bringing them to the table. However, by mid-2001 this was beginning to change. Ending gender discrimination in education was a major national advocacy priority for Actionaid and/or its campaign allies in **Bangladesh, Pakistan, The Gambia, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia**. A few African NGOs involved in ANCEFA and Elimu took their own initiatives to organise a side event on girls’ education during the (subsequently cancelled) UN Special Session on Children.

Foundations have been laid for active partnerships between the Elimu team and the International Gender Working Group, starting with preparation of a joint position paper on girls’ education for the Beijing +5 conference in June 2000 and the participation of a member of the Elimu ICT in the IGWG lobby team for this event. Other ideas for further collaboration have since been developed, such as a proposal for research on the gender dimension of PRSPs and a proposal for report cards on gender and education. However, changes in the structure and mandate of the IGWG together with the transition in Elimu co-ordination make it uncertain whether there will be capacity to take these ideas forward in 2002.

In several self-assessments, the guideline questions on gender were dealt with in a rather cursory manner, in sharp contrast to the probing and thoughtful responses given to other

questions. This suggests that either the questions were poorly designed or few coalitions are giving gender issues the attention that they deserve. A typical response was “Yes, we have integrated gender into our campaign because we a) have women on our management committee or b) are advocating on girls’ education.”

An exception however was the reply from **Nepal** which noted that:

**“AAN staff can play a particularly critical role in monitoring and assisting in developing the roles of women within movements. In this case, women were critical in launching the movement, as reported by all involved. Women were elected to the Working Committees. However, the active role of women in decision making and the Sangham’s commitment to women’s issues remains unclear.”**

*(Nepal)*

In order to address this issue, AAN could provide leadership development particularly for female movement leaders in particular, sponsor networking opportunities for women, and help develop female peer networks.

## **12. Secretariat**

The Elimu campaign has a two-person secretariat (coordinator and administrator) which reports to a steering committee (International Coordinating Team) composed mainly of Country Directors from participating country programmes. The ICT members were at a more senior level in the organisation than the coordinator, but the gap in status was small enough to encourage collegiality. This division of responsibilities avoided a situation where both management responsibility and political decision-making power are seen to be concentrated in the hands of a single “campaign head” or “team leader”.

The work of the Elimu secretariat was felt to be an important contribution to the ability of Southern coalitions to exploit such international and regional opportunities in order to advance their own concerns. Many echoed **Nigeria**’s view that “The Elimu international Coordinating team (ICT) and the international secretariat have played very supportive roles in giving direction to the campaign and the timely circulation of information. Also the management of the campaign has been democratic, though there is need to give the campaign a stronger ‘southern’ voice and flavour.” Simply having a source of timely information and reliable analysis on international events and debates was crucial for many coalitions, though the secretariat’s intelligence-gathering efforts were felt to be somewhat weaker in relation to the regional level. In this respect, the Elimu newsletters and email updates received much praise. Northern advocacy targets especially welcomed the detailed news of the achievements and activities of national campaigns, while Southern campaigners most appreciated the attempt to provide timely summaries and analysis of developments on the international scene.

Beyond dissemination of information, many also appreciated the secretariat’s proactive role in eliciting and synthesizing the diverse views and concerns of national and regional

networks ahead of international events such as the Beijing +5 summit, the Special Session on HIV-AIDS, and the Special Session on Children. Finally, the secretariat was seen to have played a useful role in facilitating the involvement of national coalitions in important country-level processes that are heavily influenced by international actors, such as PRSPs and the formulation of the national budget.

### **13. Future Role**

The first phase of Elimu, focusing on “getting the process right” in order to build capacity and organisation for the long term, has been highly successful. National coalitions have won access to policy forums and have the basic foundations in place for exploiting this new “space” effectively. Enthusiasm for doing related and complementary work towards international targets is high.

The challenge now is how to translate credibility and capacity into real impact both nationally and internationally. This challenge throws into relief some of the structural weakness of the Elimu campaign. Despite the robust independence of the national coalitions that it has helped to build, Elimu remains at international level an initiative funded and led by, and identified with, a single international organisation.

So far Actionaid has been able to avoid some of the problems that this might otherwise create by keeping the international network loose. There is no formal membership structure, decision-making is by consensus, and affiliated coalitions and country programmes take agreed campaign positions and activities forward on a wholly voluntary basis. The approach has been to create a fluid networking of groups who work separately while also working together; who have different priorities but understand the threads that tie them into a commonly held communication. This approach was felt to be very appropriate for building a common approach and discourse on education issues among diverse stakeholders, for developing capacity and enthusiasm to act on these issues and for building trust and understanding between Southern and Northern allies. However, several respondents questioned whether such a loose structure can mobilise “solid energy and resources” behind a narrowly defined issue in order to achieve real impact on common targets.

Yet there would also be difficulties and risks in trying to transform the international Elimu network as it currently stands into a tighter alliance, for example by creating a membership structure and formal election procedures for the International Coordinating Team. Despite the resolution of the Elimu team meeting in September 2000 that Actionaid should become “one member among others”, there has been no real progress towards putting this into practice, suggesting that the agency may not be ready to relinquish control over budgets, staffing and management to an external structure. As an ally in a regional network observed, it is not clear that national coalitions would rush to affiliate to Elimu when many have already joined the Global Campaign for Education, unless Elimu made a deliberate move to build an alternative power base to rival the GCE (for example by recruiting other international NGOs to become a part of Elimu).

In the early stages of the Elimu campaign, its close association with a single international NGO had many benefits. Actionaid was able to use its own strongly participatory traditions and culture to create space for national and regional coalitions to grow and develop. Without the intense pressures that are often generated when powerful international rivals attempt to forge an alliance, the process of building trust and consensus in the international Elimu network could take place slowly. The very different trajectory of the GCE shows how conflict between international organisations can create intense pressure to define strong positions and achieve “hits” very early in the campaign. Where the campaign has not emerged from an existing set of social movements or grassroots mobilisation, there is an obvious tendency for this process to crowd out the space for the weaker partners in the international network – organisations based at national or local level in the South - to develop and own the campaign’s agenda.

However, the pointed query of one Latin American ally goes to the heart of Elimu’s current dilemma. “Is it possible that Actionaid has been able to adopt such a participatory, open and democratic approach in the Elimu campaign, precisely because, as the only international organisation involved, its overall hegemony as the single most powerful partner is never really going to be challenged?” queried a Latin American campaigner. “Even if Actionaid gives up 75% of the seats on the ICT to other organisations, it will still have influence and resources that the rest of us can only dream of.” Whatever the answer, it is notable that most successful examples of transnational NGO advocacy to date, such as the Jubilee campaign, have involved alliances between more than one international organisation. This suggests that there are inherent limitations to the breadth and impact of any international campaign led, funded and managed by one NGO. In the case of Elimu, the growing ability and desire of regional networks to act independently of INGO backing, on the one hand, and GCE’s plans to build closer links with Southern partners on the other hand, indicate Elimu’s successes to date – and raise urgent questions for its future.

## **Appendix: How the review was carried out**

In September 2000, Actionaid country programmes and national education networks represented in the Rio meeting of the Elimu international network agreed that Actionaid should carry out a self-evaluation of its own role in the Elimu campaign. The aims and purpose of the review were debated by all participants and those who had already carried out an evaluation presented what they had done and what had worked well. It was agreed that this would be a preliminary review and that findings would inform the design of a more thorough, externally led evaluation, to take place before the end of 2002.

The backbone of the evaluation process was national “self-assessments”, one or two-day workshops in which Actionaid country programmes and campaign allies would review the progress of the national education campaign against the overall objectives of the Elimu campaign, and would also assess Elimu’s international advocacy and network-building efforts, asking whether they had helped to increase campaign impact at the national level. Guidelines and participatory tools for the workshops (Appendix One) were developed by the coordinator and an independent consultant, in consultation with members of the Elimu network. By March 2001, self-assessments had been completed in **Brazil, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ghana, The Gambia, Nigeria, Malawi, and Uganda.**

From January to March 2001, two well-known educationalists, Professor Kenneth King of the University of Edinburgh and Dr Rosa Maria Torre, a Latin American academic and researcher, were commissioned to carry out a scoping study of progress towards key Elimu goals in 15 countries. The studies, based on telephone and email interviews with NGO, government and donor stakeholders, examined the degree to which civil society organisations had been able to increase their role in education policy-making in the wake of the World Education Forum in Dakar, and also asked whether governments were making any important changes in priorities and priorities in line with the goals agreed in Dakar.

In addition to these core sources, we have drawn on reports, case studies and other documentation produced by Actionaid country programmes and/or national education networks, as well as a review of the role of the secretariat in disseminating information and facilitating communication between national coalitions, carried out by an independent consultant. Country programmes which made other material available in lieu of a self-assessment are **Nepal, India, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania.**

This review is also heavily indebted to ongoing research by Professor Karen Mundy and Lynn Murphy of the School of Education at Stanford University, which seeks to explore the significance and dynamics of “transnational advocacy” in the education sector. Although the study is not sponsored by us, members of the Elimu network have been actively involved in the research project, and we are very much indebted to Mundy and Murphy for permission to draw on and quote from unpublished drafts of their work in progress.

During April-September 2001, the author also did phone interviews, based on the self-assessment guidelines, with five former members of the campaign, all of whom had played a leadership role in the campaign at national, regional and/or international levels. This was a deliberate attempt to balance the risk that self-assessments might be too “soft” on the campaign’s weaknesses and failings, as it was assumed (rightly so, as it turned out) that former participants would have a more distanced perspective and would feel greater freedom to raise sensitive issues. Three of these were people who had left Actionaid for other jobs, one was an Actionaid employee who had been reassigned to a different role in the organisation, and one was a former employee of a key campaign partner.

This synthesis report has been compiled by the current coordinator of the Elimu campaign, who has attempted to be as balanced and objective as possible. However, it is notoriously difficult to assess how much credit one organisation or initiative deserves for the success of an effort as complex as an international campaign linked to many independent national campaigns. Some readers may find that Actionaid’s contribution to the aspects of this effort that they know best has been overstated, or understated, in certain respects. Any such mistakes in interpreting the available documentation are the sole responsibility of the author.

To avoid a proliferation of acronyms, this report uses the name of the country only when quoting from evaluations and other materials produced by national coalitions, e.g. “Ghana” is shorthand for “Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition”.