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The Role of 'Lifeworld' in Quality Education: The Importance of Parents and Community Participation in Schooling

The Paris Declaration, aimed at increasing aid effectiveness and impact, marked a shift in the modis operandi of the donor community, development partners, and NGO with major bi-lateral donors seeking to deliver with and through government systems and structures with inter-donor and programme coordination, perhaps exemplified by the Global Partnership of Education, funded by multiple countries and seeks to support governments implement their education sector plans. This re-thinking coincided with a rapid expansion of the education sector in the developing world as countries strived to realise their commitment to achieve universal access to free primary education by 2015.¹ This placed substantial pressure on governments to increase efficiencies within the education system, a reality further exacerbated by the pre-occupation of donor countries with value for money and beneficiary numbers to justify overseas development investment.

Therefore, a 'systemworld' approach aligns with the prevailing global philosophy and the immediate wants of both donor and recipient country governments. However, if every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets, this drive for efficiency has also been the catalyst for the erosion of quality so often associated with rapid expansion in student enrolment. Parents and communities have become increasingly instrumentalised stakeholders in education, even when formalised in national policy². Pryor (2005) demonstrates how "schooling and community life are two distinct and differently structured fields.... (and) this acts as a severe constraint on attempts to mobilise community social capital for the improvement of the school" (2005: 193).³ However, recently the need for schools to be more embedded with in the 'lifeworld' of the community and a realisation of citizen power⁴ has started to reverse this trend and demonstrate the importance and impact communities and parents can have on the quality of education when they are willing and able to participate in school life and their children's education.⁵

This paper, will discuss how recent education programming has, at best, been unable to adequately address or, at worst, further entrenched major issues within the education systems, outline why meaningful parent and community engagement in school life is so important to the realisation of quality, particularly in an uncertain world where increasingly fluid identities can undermine a child's understanding of self and damage their psychological well-being,⁶ before sharing illustrative global good practice where parents and communities have been effectively engaged to compliment the national efforts to drive quality, relevant, and meaningful education at the local level.

¹ As agreed to under the Millennium Development Goals

² Rose, P. 2003. 'Community Participation in School Policy and Practice in Malawi: Balancing local knowledge, national policies and international agency priorities'. *A Journal for Comparative and International Education*. Vol 33:1. 47-64

³ Pryor, J.2005. 'Can community participation mobilise social capital for improvement of rural schooling? A case study from Ghana'. *A Journal for Comparative and International Education*. Vol 35:2. 193-203

⁴ Kenyan parents sue ministers over illegal school fees. Cited the Guardian Newspaper.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jan/24/kenyan-parents-sue-illegal-school-fees>

⁵ Uemura, M. 1999. 'Community Participation in Education: What do we know?' The World Bank

⁶ Arnett, J. Jeffery. 2003. 'The Psychology of Globalisation'. *American Psychological Association*. Vol. 57: 10, 774–783